SPONSA CHRISTI

MEDITATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

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SPONSA CHRISTI

MEDITATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

BY

MOTHER ST. PAUL

OF THE RETREAT OF THE SACRED HEART
HOUSE OF RETREATS, BIRMINGHAM

AUTHOR OF "PASSIO CHRISTI," "MATER CHRISTI," "DONA CHRISTI," "ORTUS CHRISTI," ETC.

PREFACE BY

REV. JOSEPH RICKABY, S.J.

"Veni, sponsa Christi, accipe coronam quam tibi Dominus praeparavit in aeternum."

SEVENTH IMPRESSION

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PREFACE

"SEND a woman to a woman, they understand one another better than we can," was the saying of an experienced Jesuit of the olden time—Father Albany James Christie. In like manner Mother Stuart, of the Society of the Sacred Heart, observes that a woman's piety is not quite a man's piety, her faults not a man's faults, her aspirations, her aptitudes other than a man's. This fact justifies Nuns writing Meditation Books for the use of Nuns —*Sponsa Christi* is a feminine title. At the same time this book will be valuable for Priests and male Religious, not only to administer in Convents, but to make their own meditations for their own benefit, if they will remember that the book is not written primarily for men, and in some cases requires adaptation to their case.

There is a refreshing originality about these Meditations, and many shafts are aimed in them that will go home. The best thing about them is the high standard on which they insist. The world loves to talk of lazy monks and idle nuns; and in this, as in so many other of its criticisms, the world is half-right. Idleness, in the sense of being content with achieving little, of acquiescence in low ideals,

is the besetting danger of us Religious. Try as we may, we may achieve, or seem to achieve, but little; nevertheless our aspirations ought ever to aim high, our ideas to be large, our desires vast. We are bound to aim at holiness in our own persons, and at doing signal service to the Church. Practice always falls short of theory; the ideal is never fully realized. Given a low standard, practice will be still lower, and may conceivably sink to very base depths.

The title *Sponsa Christi* does not belong to Religious alone. The whole Church is the Spouse of Christ, and every baptized soul has a right to the title. Religious life is but an intensified Christianity. There is not one perfection for the Religious, another for the Secular; one for the Priest, another for the layman. Perfection is the same for all. *Be ye perfect* (St. Matt. v. 27) is addressed to all Christians. Why, then, does our Lord say to the young man: *If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast?* (St. Matt. xix. 21). Because He would show him a *way* to perfection, which way is by detachment from creatures. Perfection consists, as St. Francis of Sales says, in loving God above all things and our neighbour as ourselves (St. Mark xii. 33). Such perfect love involves detachment from self, it involves what has been called "sitting loose to creatures," a constant readiness to let them go for the service of God and our fellow-man. But for the most part men, when they have the enjoyment of creatures, are anything but ready to let them go. To facilitate his love of

God, the Religious pledges himself under vow to a certain actual parting with creatures. He promises to take certain self-denying means to the attainment of the perfection of charity—means effectual, though not absolutely indispensable; means which his fellow-Christian does not bind himself to employ. This bond of vow, supervening upon the renunciations made at Baptism, ties the soul still further to its Redeemer. This further tie makes the religious soul specially and peculiarly the Bride of Christ. Specially and peculiarly, but by no means exclusively, therefore even lay-folk may derive edification and spiritual profit from these Meditations. To be a Christian at all a man must in one way or another renounce all things. Our Lord's word is absolute: *Unless a man renounce all things, he cannot be My disciple* (St. Luke xiv. 33). The good Christian is at heart a Religious, as was the Blessed Martyr, Thomas More. We may call him a "potential Religious." Without taking the vows, the good Christian practises according to his state the virtues of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. Having thus the mind of a Religious, the mother of a family may benefit by the meditations of a Religious. Haply these Meditations may make her less unwilling to see a darling son or daughter embrace the religious state.

Joseph Rickaby, S. J.

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PRAYERS BEFORE MEDITATION

Veni, Sancte Spiritus, reple tuorum corda fidelium, et tui amoris in eis ignem accende.

V. Emitte Spiritum tuum et creabuntur

R. Et renovabis faciem terrae.

Oremus

Deus, qui corda fidelium sancti Spiritus illustratione docuisti, da nobis in eodem Spiritu recta sapere, et de ejus semper consolatione gaudere. Per Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen.

Preparatory Prayer

Grant, O Lord, that during this Meditation, all the thoughts of my mind, all the intentions of my heart, and all the powers of my soul, may tend purely and entirely to the service and praise of Thy Divine Majesty.

PRAYERS AFTER MEDITATION

O Beloved Word of God, teach me to be generous, teach me to serve Thee as Thou deservest, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and not to ask for any reward save that of knowing that I do Thy will.

Sume, Domine et suscipe omnem meam libertatem, meam memoriam, meum intellectum, et omnem voluntatem meam, quidquid habeo et possideo: Tu mihi haec omnia dedisti, Tibi, Domine, ea restituo; omnia Tua sunt, dispone pro omne voluntate Tua. Da mihi Tuum amorem et gratiam, nam haec mihi sufficit. Amen. (St. Ignatius.)

Prayer used by St. Ignatius in his Spiritual Exercises

Anima Christi, sanctifica me.
Corpus Christi, salva me.
Sanguis Christi, inebria me.
Aqua lateris Christi, lava me.

Passio Christi, conforta me.
O bone Jesu, exaudi me.
Intra Tua vulnera absconde me.
Ne permittas me separari a Te.

Ab hoste maligno defende me.
In hora mortis mea voca me;
Et jube me venire ad Te.
Ut cum sanctis Tuis laudem Te,
In saecula saeculorum. Amen.

Translation by Cardinal Newman

Soul of Christ, be my sanctification;
Body of Christ, be my salvation;
Blood of Christ, fill all my veins;
Water of Christ's side, wash out my stains;
Passion of Christ, my comfort be;
O good Jesu, listen to me:
In Thy wounds I fain would hide,
Ne'er to be parted from Thy side;
Guard me, should the foe assail me;
Call me when my life shall fail me;
Bid me come to Thee above
With Thy saints to sing Thy love,
World without end. Amen.

Pater Noster. Ave Maria.

Not as though I had already attained or were already perfect: but I follow after, if I may by any means apprehend, wherein I am also apprehended by Christ JESUS. *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended. But one thing I do: Forgetting the things that are behind and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ* JESUS.

Let us, therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded.—St. Paul to the Philippians (chap. iii. 12–15).

SPONSA CHRISTI

THE CALL

"*If thou wilt be perfect, come*" (St. Matt. xix. 21).

1*st Prelude.* The young ruler kneeling at the feet of JESUS.
2*nd Prelude.* The grace to listen to the Master's calls.

Point I.—THE CALL

THE call was given to one who wanted to do more than just keep the Commandments. The young ruler knew that he must do that if he would "enter into life," that is, if he would save his soul; but he felt that there was something higher, nobler, more heroic, to which some hidden force was impelling him. He was very much in earnest and very eager to know what this something was, and so he came *running*, and kneeling at the feet of JESUS said: "Master, what must I *do?*" It was the grace of *Vocation*. That soul had been marked out by the Heavenly Bridegroom as one to whom He could say: "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." He was face to face with a crisis—a turning-point in his life. He had heard the call unmistakably in

his heart, and he came to Him Who had called, for an explanation and for counsel: "What is it that you want? I have lived uprightly; done, as far as I know, all that is right. What is yet wanting to me?"

How wisely the young ruler acted! He went to the right place and to the right Person to have his difficulties solved. He did not pretend that there was no call, nor did he say that he was content to be as he was and wanted nothing higher. No, he was humble, diffident, ready to ask, willing to learn: in fact, anxious to look the matter fairly in the face.

Point II.—The Master's Dealings with him

The Heart of Jesus went out to this young man, he was so evidently in earnest, so frank, so eager to do his best with the life that lay before him, so anxious to know what was wanting in him. "Jesus looking on him, loved him," and longed for him to come up higher and give himself entirely to Him by a life of self-sacrifice. And so He said to him: You are quite right, there *is* something more, something higher, and it is I who have put the craving for it into your heart, "one thing is wanting to you," *if you will* you can have it, it rests with you. Do you *really* want to be perfect, to have nothing wanting, to be all that you are capable of being, all that I intended you to be when I created you, all that I want you to be? Do you really want

to be a consolation to My Sacred Heart? You can be if you will. I am giving you the opportunity now—"*Come* and *follow Me.*" Take Me as your model, *leave* all that you hold dear—parents, home, possessions—everything, as I did. *Give* all that you have, as I did. "If thou wilt be perfect, come and follow Me," in a life of self-sacrifice, "and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven."

Then the young man understood that the heroic thing to which he was being impelled was the *Cross.*

Point III.—The Response

But when he understood he was *sad;* he felt that he could not go as far as that, could not answer the Call and follow the Master in the way that He pointed out to him. "He had great possessions," and he did not feel at all inclined to give them up. And so we watch him going sorrowfully away from his best Friend, turning his back on almost the best gift God ever bestows upon man—the gift of a Religious Vocation. Let us hope that the *look* and the *love* of Jesus pursued him and led him to reconsider the matter. If not, he lost much—his Vocation, with all that that means, his chance of being more perfect, of living on a higher level, of corresponding to a special grace. And he made the salvation of his soul a far harder and more complicated task than it would have been had he followed the counsels of perfection given to him not only by One who *loved* him, but by Him who created

him, that he might save his soul, and then showed him the best way *for him* to do it.

But to answer the call *is* possible, and it has been answered by hundreds of thousands who through all eternity will "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." These said: I *will* be perfect, cost what it may, I *will* correspond to all He suggests, I *will* go where He calls and follow where He leads, I *will* take Him as my model. And they left home, brethren, sisters, father, mother, wife, children, lands, possessions—*all*, for the sake of Him Who called them.

The Heavenly Bridegroom still goes about seeking His chosen ones; to one and another He gives His gracious call, and He knows how difficult it is to answer it. "How hardly" (*with what difficulty*), He says, "shall they that have riches" (*anything that they count precious*) "answer My Call." He goes further, and says, "With men it is *impossible*," but fortunately, "with God *all* things are possible." And so He still calls: "*If thou wilt, come.*" And He never gives a call without giving the grace and the means to answer it.

Colloquy. "Behold, we *have* left all things and have followed Thee."

"Amen, I say to you, there is no man who hath left house or brethren or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for My sake and for the gospel, who shall not receive an hundred

times as much now in this time . . . with persecutions: and in the world to come life everlasting" (St. Mark x. 28–30).

Resolution. To obey His Calls at whatever cost.

Spiritual Bouquet. "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell, give, come, follow."

THE ESPOUSALS

"*Arise, arise, put on thy strength, put on the garments of thy glory*" (Isaias lii. 1).

1*st Prelude.* The ceremony of a Religious Clothing.
2*nd Prelude.* Grace to value the day of my Espousals.

Point I.—"ARISE! ARISE!"

IT is the day of my Espousals, and it is my Beloved Who is speaking: Arise, arise, try to understand the meaning of this marvellous day. My "look" and My "love" (St. Mark x. 21) followed you, you could not get away from them, you looked round at all the happiness the world had to give, and you could not find what you were seeking—there was nothing that could fill your heart, and you said passionately, almost despairingly: "*I have chosen*, and my choice is to be an abject in the House of my GOD. I prefer that to all the riches and honour that the world has to give: 'one day spent in Thy courts is better than thousands' spent elsewhere." (Ps. lxxxiii. 11.) And now, after some time spent in these courts, you are daring to say with little Saint Agnes: "Christ is my Spouse, He chose me first, His will I be." And it is just

because you understand that I chose you first that you dare to say it. "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you" (St. John xv. 16). Now, *arise* to your high calling, to your inestimable privilege. To-day GOD is going to do great things for you—even to espouse you to His Own Son.

"*Do you desire to be blessed, consecrated and affianced to our Lord JESUS CHRIST, the Son of the Most High GOD?*" (Roman Pontifical). Is that question really being put to *me?* That, indeed, is my desire, for I know that although, as St. Bernard says, "the souls of *all* the just are the spouses of the Lord, yet the virgins consecrated to GOD are so in a very special sense." It is in this special sense that I want to be His spouse, and I am ready to sacrifice all—even myself for Him.

Point II.—"PUT ON THY STRENGTH"

My strength! what is it? Never before have I felt my weakness so much, my absolute inability to rise to the occasion of this great moment, my unworthiness, my nothingness. All I can do is to sit still and let Him Who has chosen me act for me. "I am but a little child, and know not how to go out and come in" (3 Kings iii. 7).

This was exactly Gedeon's position when GOD chose him for special favours; and GOD'S answer to His servant was, "Go in this thy strength." What was his strength? That he was mean and little in his own eyes and unworthy to be singled out to

do God's work in a special way. "Behold," he says, "my family is the meanest in Manasses, and I am the least in my father's house." It is enough, it is all that God wants—*this* is strength, go forward in it, and certainly "I shall be with thee" (Judges vi. 14–16).

And this is my strength too; if I keep in the dispositions that I am in to-day, all will be well. "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. xii. 9), says my Beloved, and it is *My* strength that you are putting on to-day. I am taking you to be My spouse, and giving you a share in all that I am, and in all that I have. "I shall be with thee" always, "thou art Mine." Is not this *strength?*

Point III.—"Put on the Garments of thy Glory"

What are these garments? There is no glory about them in the eyes of the world, the world scoffs at them, derides them, despises them, calls those who wear them fools for their pains. But "the glory of the King's daughter is *within*," and the world cannot be expected to understand. It is her Bridegroom who calls them "garments of glory," for they are none other than His own livery, making it plain to all, that those who wear it have put off the world's livery, and intend to have nothing to do with its pleasures and vanities, its riches and honours, its esteem and flattery. All that the world loves and values is nothing to them now, from

henceforth they intend to *follow after* all that is opposed to the spirit of the world.

In putting on my livery, then, I have identified myself with JESUS Christ, have declared that I want to follow closely in His steps. If the world hates me, I shall know that it is because it hated Him (St. John xv. 8). If things are difficult in the courts of the King's House, I shall know that it is only because I am wearing the King's livery. I know what His life was, and with my eyes open I say that I want to share it. So I gladly put on the livery, believing it to consist of " garments of glory "; and my Divine Spouse looking at me once again loves me, and says, " I have called thee by thy name, thou art Mine " (Isaias xliii. 1); thou art betrothed to Me for ever.

Colloquy with my Heavenly Spouse. What can I bring Thee in return for Thy wonderful goodness to me? What can I bring as dowry? Thou hast no need of riches and honour and talents and intellect. I have nothing but my nothingness to offer.

My child, what I want is a pure heart, an unflinching obedience, and a perfect detachment from all that the world has to give. In other words, I want you to identify yourself with Me by practising the same virtues as I practised from My cradle in a manger to My death upon a cross.

Resolution. To regard myself as belonging as irrevocably to Him Who has called me, as if I had already taken my Vows.

Spiritual Bouquet. Veni, sponsa Christi, tota pulchra es ("Come, spouse of Christ, thou art all fair").

THE PROFESSION

"*Not as though I had already attained or were already perfect, but I* follow after" (Phil. iii. 12).

1*st Prelude.* The ceremony of a Religious Profession.

2*nd Prelude.* Grace to be ever "mindful of my bonds" (Col. iv. 18).

Point I.—Profession—The Fixing of the State

"Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go forth to meet Him." The day of my Profession has come—the day on which I am to be allowed to *fix* myself in the Religious state. I have been chosen, been called, have answered the call by offering myself, have been accepted, have spent two or three years in learning what the obligations of the Religious state are, and now I am going to take a further step—make these obligations mine. By taking the three vows I am going to fix myself in the state of a Religious—that is of one who is *bound* to strive after perfection. I could have thus striven, and perhaps I did, while I was in the world; but it was because I chose to do so, there would have been no sin if I had not. I should have broken no commandment, but after to-day it will be different, my

standard will be altered, my level raised. Why, of my own free will, having full knowledge of what I am doing, do I take this fresh obligation upon myself and make it a *sin* for me not to strive always towards perfection? Simply because I could not resist His look, when He suggested the counsels of perfection to me, and said, "If thou wilt be perfect, come." I wanted to be perfect as soon as I saw that look and heard Him speak to me, and would there and then have put myself under this obligation, but He has made me wait till now. And now I am going to take my three Vows and thus profess openly that I am from henceforth bound to the Religious state—as far as *I* am concerned I am going to *fix* myself in it—fix myself in the state of being always obliged to tend towards perfection. This is to be my first thought always and my principal duty. My standard will be raised after my Profession—all slackness and tepidity will be absolutely forbidden to me. There can be no half measures now about mortifications and self-denials and penances, no dallying with temptations. Such pamperings of self are not for one who is pledged to strive after perfection. No, rather, "forgetting the things that are behind and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus. Let us, therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded" (Phil. iii. 13–15). So says St. Paul—and we can see him striving with all the

strength of his ardent, thorough nature, not daring to lose a moment in looking behind lest the prize of his vocation should slip beyond his reach. I am going to-day to be a "follower" of him as he advised (ver. 17), and to bind myself down to this state of continual striving for the mastery over self, that I may belong entirely to Him who has chosen me. And with all humility I will say again with St. Paul, "Not as though I had already attained or were already perfect, but I *follow after*" (ver. 12). As long as I can say "I follow after," all will be well in spite of failures.

Point II.—The Bonds

What were St. Paul's bonds, of which he so touchingly asked the Christians of Colossæ to be mindful?

The ordinary bonds to which all prisoners have to submit—sometimes actual chains, but always the loss of liberty and independence, separation from family, friends, country, books, occupation, interests; a lack of the luxuries—often of the necessities—of life; poverty, mortification, submission to authority, cessation of active work—even work for the salvation of souls. How many saintly prisoners have felt the pressure of all these bonds! and yet how willing, how proud they have been to be the prisoners of Jesus Christ! St. Paul, writing to the Bishop of Ephesus from his prison at Rome, not long before his martyrdom, says, "Be not ashamed of me *His prisoner*" (2 Tim. i. 8). The thought

that he was *His* prisoner took all the pain and all the shame out of the bonds.

It is to-day that I am to put on *my* bonds. They are much the same as St. Paul's, affecting body as well as soul. What are they? My Vows, which are to bind me firmly to my state as a Religious, and make me just as surely "a prisoner of JESUS Christ" as St. Paul's bonds made him.

I bind myself with the Vow of *Poverty*, a virtue for which its possessor gets the same blessing from our Lord as do the "persecuted." He says of both kinds of martyrs: "Theirs is the kingdom of Heaven" (St. Matt. v. 3 and 10). I bind myself with the Vow of *Chastity*, which means a continual warfare, to which death alone can put an end. I bind myself with the Vow of *Obedience*, which means an unceasing mortification of my own will and judgment.

Thus bound it will be impossible for me to forget that I am a prisoner, the fretting and chafing caused by the bonds will make that impossible. But do I want to forget? No indeed, otherwise I should not of my own accord put on the bonds and give myself up to a martyrdom lasting not for a few hours only, but for life. A daily martyrdom with no possibility of getting away! What a terrible picture, says the world—and sometimes it is our own immediate little world that says so; but the Spouse of Christ answers with St. Paul: "What mean ye weeping and afflicting my heart? for I am ready

not only to be *bound*, but to *die* also for the Name of the Lord JESUS" (Acts xxi. 13); and it is true, for her Divine Spouse has bound her to Himself with cords of love, which nothing can sever, and she is a willing, a happy, a proud prisoner.

What makes me choose to bind myself thus? The simple fact that JESUS was good enough to single me out and to say to me: "If *thou* wilt be perfect, *come*." His choice of me produced a love in my heart which nothing short of giving all—that is of binding myself down to share everything with Him—could satisfy. And in return He makes an eternal contract with *me*, gives Himself to me and takes me as His own spouse. As He watches me putting on the bonds, He says to me, "Thou art all fair, my love" (Cant. iv. 7), and His marriage gifts to me, in return for my vows of fidelity to Him, are a complete blotting out of all the past, a perfectly fresh start, the debt of sin—even of venial sin—cancelled, so that if I were to die at that moment there would be no need of Purgatory! Surely if the Bride gives generously the Bridegroom outdoes her! How I should treasure my marriage gifts, and how I should treasure also my marriage bonds, which are the proofs—nay, the very conditions—of my contract! It is true they will harass and fret and gall me often, but only the part of me that has to die. The other part of me loves them, because they bind me to my Divine Spouse, and make me His prisoner for ever. Oh, blessed bonds

of love! precious memorials of the day of my Religious Profession.

Colloquy with my Heavenly Spouse, Who loves to see me putting on the bonds, and Who whispers: The greater your love, the less you will feel them.

Resolution. Never to allow my bonds to get slack.

Spiritual Bouquet. "Now a prisoner also of JESUS Christ" (Philem. i. 9).

HOLY POVERTY

"*Neither did any one say that aught of the things which he possessed was his own*" (Acts iv. 32).

1*st Prelude.* The early Christians laying their goods at the Apostles' feet.

2*nd Prelude.* The grace to understand Holy Poverty.

Point I.—The Vow of Poverty

"As having nothing and possessing all things" (2 Cor. vi. 10). This ought to be true of one who has taken the Vow of Poverty. How? Because, the Heavenly Spouse answers, though thou hast left all at My call, "thou art ever *with Me*, and all that I have is thine" (St. Luke xv. 31). What hast Thou, Lord? Nothing as the world reckons. I *was* rich, and I wanted to be poor, but Poverty was unknown in Heaven. I had to come to earth to find it. There was much of it on earth, but men despised it and no one knew its value; so for *your* sake and to teach you its value I *became* poor; and because you have thrown in your lot with Me, you must share My Poverty; to this I have called you, it is one of the bonds which bind you to your vocation and to Me; and the more you give up voluntarily for My sake, the more of the true riches you

will possess. It is only by having nothing that you can possess all things.

How is it with me? Do I not complain sometimes that I do not possess all things, that I am not "a good Religious," that I cannot pray, that my recollection and my interior life are not what I should like them to be, that there are certain temptations to which I still find myself yielding. I must own that I am sometimes rather disappointed because I do not seem to have that full possession of spiritual things which I expected. May the reason not be that the "having nothing" is not quite true of me yet, and that God is waiting for more *room* for His treasures? I cannot possess all *His* good things if the place in my heart is taken up with my *own* possessions! Let me try to get a clear idea of it all. What did I do when I took the Vow of Poverty? I deliberately put a chain on my liberty, my independence, my wishes, instincts and tastes, for I promised never to have anything for myself without permission, and never to give anything to another without permission. It was the bond with which my crucified Lord bound Himself, and it was only on the condition that I followed His example that He could entertain the thought of taking me as His spouse. I wanted with my whole heart to leave all and follow Him; to have nothing of my own to dispose of, to sacrifice myself entirely to Him; and so I took the Vow of Poverty, and if I am faithful to it my life is one incessant round of little

sacrifices. I have no need to be hunting about for mortifications. But *am* I faithful? It is not difficult surely to find out—the Vow of Poverty is a very practical thing; let me try to be practical in my Meditation on it.

If the livery that I wore so proudly on the day of my Espousals frets me; if something old or not quite comfortable is given me to wear; if I have, according to my own notions, an insufficiency of warm clothing; if I cannot have just the books I want; if pens, ink and paper are not quite to my taste; if time is wasted for lack of conveniences (this is how the devil represents the case); if something has been forgotten at my place at table: what is my attitude? Is it that of one who has promised never to have anything without permission? Do I rejoice that I am the spouse of Christ who is poor, and feel grateful that I have an opportunity of feeling the pinch of poverty? or do I at once point out the defects and the inconveniences and seek to remedy them? Do I act as if I believed that I have nothing of my own? Cell, clothing, food, books—none of them are mine. I have permission to use them, but I have not the slightest right to any of them. And yet I fancy that I have the right to grumble about them! Am I strict with myself about receiving or giving without permission? Everything belongs to the Community, not to me; before I can give anything I must *steal* it from the Community.

A little self-examination on these points will show

me how easily my Vow of Poverty may be in danger, and will show me also that I am not yet as faithful to it as I ought to be. My Divine Spouse is ready to give me the *possession of all things* now, He does not want to wait till I get to Heaven, but He must wait till I *have nothing*.

Point II.—The Virtue of Poverty

My Vow of Poverty is the ladder by which I am striving to climb to perfection. What I want to reach with its help is the *Virtue* of Poverty. The practice of the Virtue is far more difficult and also far more perfect than the practice of the Vow. There are degrees of this Virtue just as there are of the Virtue of Humility, and in the *third degree* the two run into one another and defy distinction. To practise the Virtue of Poverty is to be "*poor in spirit*," and to earn the title of "*Blessed*."

It was the *Vow* of Poverty that put me on the road which leads to perfection, and pledged me to walk on it; but it is the *Virtue* of Poverty that keeps me on the road, and prevents me from stopping to gather the fruits and flowers that grow by the wayside, because to do so would hinder my progress and *might* lead to my straying off the path altogether.

Let me look at a few of the things which constitute the Virtue of Poverty, and which aid and safeguard the Vow.

1. Taking quietly and unostentatiously the lowest place and the worst things in the house. I am not

bound by my Vow to do this, but I *am* bound not to consider any place as mine. The Virtue steps in and aids the Vow.

2. Doing the menial duties that nobody likes doing —not with the air of a martyr, but of one who delights to be taken at her word and to be an " abject " in the House of God. Here, again, I am not *bound* by my Vow to anything beyond acting as a poor woman, and doing whatever is given me to do for a living, but if I am poor in spirit I shall search out the menial duties as being the surest way of banishing all discontent, and so I shall safeguard my Vow.

3. Not being in the least surprised—much less hurt —if left out and forgotten. I am bound by my Vow to have only what is given me; the Virtue says: Remember that consideration and attention are gifts too, and gifts to which you have no *right*, you cannot claim them.

4. Taking it as a matter of course that my remarks, opinions and suggestions should be considered of little account. Otherwise a sense of *possession* of intellect, talents, ideas, wit, would soon endanger the Vow—it is Poverty of spirit which safeguards it by saying: Even these are not yours.

5. The third degree of Poverty *rejoices* in privations and humiliations, considering that in having these it has its rights; it sets its face against making excuses, explaining itself and giving reasons even when falsely accused; it takes interruptions patiently and cheerfully, knowing that time, like everything

else, is only lent; it is very careful about detachment even from the most insignificant things; it renews its permissions carefully and regularly for fear of abusing them; it never allows itself to look regretfully back at the things it has left.

Shall I ever be really "poor in spirit," and hear my Divine Spouse calling me "Blessed"? I do not know, sometimes it all seems so very far off, but I do know that I am on the road that leads to it, and that it rests with me how far I get on the road. I have all the helps that the "Blessed" had—it is simply a matter of correspondence to grace.

Colloquy. O my Divine Spouse, Who for me didst become poor, give me the grace to go bravely on without any discouragement at my many failures, knowing that there is not a single step along the road to perfection which Thou hast not taken and taken *for me.*

Resolution. To try to be really poor.

Spiritual Bouquet. "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

HOLY CHASTITY

"*Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt*" (*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*). (St. Matt. v. 8.)

1*st Prelude.* With the angels before the Tabernacle.
2*nd Prelude.* The grace of an angelic purity.

Point I.—The Vow of Chastity

Why have I chosen a place amongst the Angels for my "composition of place"? Because I am going to consider my Vow of Chastity, and that Vow binds me to nothing less than a heavenly and angelic purity. By reason of that Vow I am striving, with the help of God's grace, to be like the Angels, all *spirit* and no body. By my Vow of Chastity I become the spouse of the King of kings; my body, with all its senses, belongs to Him, *and He is jealous.* "These follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." Who are these favoured ones, and why are they thus favoured? "Because they are *virgins*" (Apoc. xiv. 4). He Who chose a Virgin for His mother, and allowed the Virgin Apostle a nearness to Himself which none of the others enjoyed, has surely a special love for Holy Chastity. Let me see to it that I guard diligently this sweet

virtue, hedging it round by my rules of modesty, my *daily* mortification, my self-denial and penance —all so much ammunition, not only to safeguard my citadel, but to use in attacking any foe that would dare to harm it. "Forgetting the things that are behind and stretching forth myself to those that are before," by means of Holy Chastity, "I press towards the mark" (Phil. iii. 13).

Point II.—"BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART"

By the Vow of Chastity the Religious consecrates herself to GOD as His Victim. The victims for sacrifice under the Old Law had to be spotless and without blemish. The Lamb of God demands a spotless purity from those whom He chooses as His spouses, and they, in consequence, lay themselves down upon the Altar, willing victims, consecrating to Him both body and soul. And in very deed they *are* victims, and life becomes for them one continual sacrifice, one continual saying *No* to self. They must be always on the look-out to keep up the standard of holiness and purity that their Divine Spouse requires of them. All their love must be given to Him—all inclinations, dispositions, desires, affections immolated to Him Who is jealous, but Who will one day reward their fidelity by presenting them as chaste virgins to His Father (2 Cor. xi. 2), and allow them through all eternity to "follow Him whithersoever He goeth."

Only the "pure in *heart*" can attain to this high

standard. "My child, give Me thy heart," for it is there that the work must be done. Love is the only thing which can ensure the angelic virtue. If the heart is once given to the Divine Spouse all will be well, for nothing and nobody—not even self—can come between, and give Him cause for jealousy. If anything *does* come in, then just by that much the heart is not pure—for it is not wholly given. The pure in heart shall see GOD, there is nothing to prevent the vision of Him—it is a direct consequence of their purity. If the vision of GOD is clouded, it is the heart that is at fault, something is wrong there, something has got in which has weakened its power of sight, its purity is dimmed.

The kind of purity that the Divine Spouse looks for in those who are consecrated to Him, is a purity that can pierce beyond the veil of earth with all its clouds of trouble, and mists of misunderstandings, and fogs of difficulties, and storms of sin, and fix its eye of faith on GOD; a purity that *endures* because it sees Him who is invisible (Heb. xi. 27); a purity that sees GOD in every person, every duty, every order, every trial, every temptation, every difficulty; a purity that sees things always from GOD'S point of view and wants only His will. With the pure in heart the angelic virtue is as safe as it would be with the Angels themselves. Oh, "Blessed are the pure in heart," for they not only see GOD now, but they shall be for ever "*without spot* before His Throne" (Apoc. xiv. 5).

Colloquy with Him Who is "holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners" (Heb. vii. 26).

Resolution. To remember the jealousy of my Bridegroom.

Spiritual Bouquet. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see GOD."

HOLY OBEDIENCE

"*Servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with a good will serving, as to the Lord and not to men*" (Eph. vi. 6, 7).

1*st Prelude.* The Crucifix—"Obedient unto death—even the death of the cross."

2*nd Prelude.* The grace to love Holy Obedience.

Point I.—The Vow of Obedience

This is without doubt the most perfect of the three Vows, because in it is found all that is necessary for a perfect life. It comprises the other two Vows. By my Vow of Obedience I pledge myself to submit my reason, my judgment, my will to my Superior, who is God's representative to me. My Vow puts me in immediate touch with God. It is God whom I obey, not man—but God hides Himself, as He ever must, under human imperfections, for no man can see His Face and live. These are, as it were, His garments, and I must eagerly, gladly and with a faith that never wavers, press through the crowd of all my questioning, criticizing, rebellious thoughts and "touch the hem of His garment." And I shall find that as soon as I *touch*, I am made perfectly whole—the sacrifice is complete—it is a

holocaust—the victim is in its place. The touch of faith, which alone can produce perfect obedience, proves that I realize that my Superior is GOD to me; and when I realize this, obedience is bound to follow, and it will be prompt, entire, exact and without any reserve. GOD does not ask of me great deeds or excessive penances or extraordinary talents, but He does ask absolute fidelity to my Vow of Obedience. And my Obedience must be *joyful*, or the sacrifice lacks something. "GOD loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. ix. 7), and each act of obedience is a gift that I offer to Him. Let me not offer my gifts with "a sad countenance," as the Pharisees did, but rather like Solomon and his people who in the simplicity of their hearts *joyfully* offered all their gifts to GOD (1 Par. xxix. 17).

Point II.—OBEDIENCE IN PRACTICE

A few points which I am now going to study carefully will help me to find out whether my Obedience is what it ought to be: that is to say, whether it is such that no matter what Superior GOD may choose to be His representative to me, I shall joyfully obey that Superior. I shall see GOD in every order, every reprimand, every decision. And though the orders may not *in themselves* be the best, though the judgment may be faulty and the ideas weak, yet faith will make me fully persuaded that they are the best for me, and that there is only one road along which to travel towards perfection, and that is Holy

Obedience. Obedience means nothing if it does not mean an annihilation of one's own will and judgment and ideas and points of view—" an interior resignation " St. Ignatius calls it.

If, then, my obedience is supernatural, the following will be true of me :—

I shall show by my manner a great respect for my Superior's orders and wishes; and this respect will be interior too.

I shall never allow myself to speak depreciatingly of my Superior, nor listen to others doing so without showing disapproval.

I shall act on the principle that GOD'S representative must never be allowed to be in the wrong, and shall jealously shield my Superior, even if to do so means allowing the blame to fall on myself. For example: the result of obedience to a certain order has been palpably a failure, if I understand the principle of obedience I shall act *supernaturally*, and bear the blame and the discomfiture and the humiliation myself; if I do not yet understand I shall act *naturally* and say, " I only did what I was told," and so pass on the blame and the discomfiture and the humiliation to my Superior.

I shall not discuss my Superior nor question nor criticize any of her actions. If my opinion is asked by those who have a right to ask it, and it is my painful duty to differ from my Superior, I shall let it be clearly seen how painful the duty is.

I shall always be eager, as far as I can, to lessen

the troubles and anxieties of my Superiors, and to make their concerns and interests mine.

I shall receive all corrections with love, gratitude and humility.

A faithful examen on these and similar points will show me to what degree of obedience I have attained.

Colloquy with my Divine Spouse, Who was "obedient unto death—even the death of the cross"—and Who says to me: The degree of obedience that I wish my child to attain is that of obedience unto death too—even the death of *self*.

Resolution. To renew constantly my Vow of Obedience.

Spiritual Bouquet. "Whatsoever *He* shall say to you, do."

RENEWAL OF VOWS

"*They that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength*" (Isaias xl. 31).

1*st Prelude.* Our Lady, at the age of three years, presenting herself to God on the Temple steps.

2*nd Prelude.* Grace to realize what I mean when I present myself.

Point I.—The Renewal—What it is

It is a coming before God publicly—that is before my Community—to renew my Vows, to remind myself, my Sisters and Him that I have made them and that I am glad that I have, that I meant what I said, that I am in earnest, and that my Vows are more precious, more binding, more sacred to me than anything else on earth.

What is it, then, that I am going to renew? In one word it is my *will*, for if that is allowed to get weak and flabby, the virtues of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience will be immediately in danger; and I have always to remember that the virtues are the sheaths which protect the vows, and are much more easily touched than the vows themselves. What need have I to pray: "Renew a right spirit within me"? (Ps. l. 12.) If Thou wilt do this, O Lord,

then I dare renew my Vows. I dare say once more: *Sume et suscipe omnem voluntatem meam* ("Take and receive all my will").

So a Renewal of Vows is a confession before my Community and before all the Court of Heaven that I have no regrets about my Vocation, and that I intend, by GOD'S grace, to continue the daily hand-to-hand fight against everything that would harm, mar or touch the Poverty, Chastity and Obedience to which I am pledged: in one word, that I intend to leave no stone unturned that will enable me to "*walk worthy of the Vocation in which I am called*" (Eph. iv. 1).

Point II.—THE RENEWAL—WHAT I AM GOING TO DO

1. *To present myself* humbly before my Divine Spouse as I did when I made my Vows for the first time—to put myself back to that Presentation in His Temple when I offered myself to Him as a victim, and to say, Here I am, Lord, it is so many months—so many years—since I entered into Thy wounds and was nailed to the cross with Thee, please look at the nails and see whether they need tightening.

Then I shall remind Him once again that I am His Spouse, that He chose me Himself, that He gave me my name. I shall tell Him again that I love Him, that I love the cross, that I love the

nails, and I shall beseech Him not to forget the day of His espousals (Jer. ii. 2).

2. I am going *to give Him thanks* for my Vocation. How glad I am to have an opportunity of doing this publicly! My heart cannot but be full of gratitude as I recall how strangely and markedly the whole matter of my Vocation was *His* doing. How true it is that I did not choose Him, but that He, to my ever-increasing surprise, chose me! Thou art *Mine*, My spouse. What sweet music those words make in my heart! Oh, how can I ever thank Thee enough! Come, all ye Saints, and especially my dear Patron; come, all ye Angels, and share the joy of my Guardian Angel; come, O Holy Mother of God, who at such an early age didst present thyself in the House of God; come and witness the Renewal of my Vows. I am going to proclaim before the whole Court of Heaven that I am the Spouse of Christ, and that I am justly proud of my high calling. Help me to walk worthy of it, till you see me walking through the streets of your city in the great Procession of the Lamb.

3. *To let my Community know* that all is well with me. I owe something to those who are always bearing with me, and they shall be assured that, in spite of all, my face is set towards Sion. It is a time of Renewal for us all—some are renewing their intense desire to make their vows, some are renewing them publicly, and some are renewing them deep down in the silent gratitude of their own hearts,

where only their Beloved may penetrate. All are praying for the same thing, all have the same end in view, the same hopes, the same desires, the same rule to follow, the same means of following it. How fervently ought I to thank God for allowing me to spend my life amongst those whose faces are set so unmistakably heavenwards, who are always tending towards perfection, whose example of generosity and fervour is a constant stimulant to those of us who may be inclined to lag behind and to be satisfied with a low level. God grant that we may all keep up to the standard of the high Vocation to which we have been called, and that in the day when the Royal Bridegroom counts up His jewels not *one* may be wanting from His crown.

Colloquy. O my Divine Spouse, I want, as I press closer to Thee, to look back over the years that have passed since I fixed myself in the Religious state and became one of Thy chosen ones. I have not always kept up to that high standard; that striving after perfection in order to make myself pleasing in Thine eyes has not always been sustained. I have failed to realize my state and its obligations, and have caused Thee sorrow and disappointment over and over again. Oh, forgive Thy child, and help me to make this Renewal a real one; help me to say with St. Paul: "Not as though I had already attained

or were already perfect, but *I follow after*" (Phil. iii. 12).

Resolution. To renew my Vows every day at Holy Communion.

Spiritual Bouquet. "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you" (Ezech. xxxvi. 26).

MY VOCATION

(*For an Anniversary*)

"*Wherefore, brethren, labour the more that by good works you may make sure your calling and election*" (2 Pet. i. 10).

1*st Prelude.* At the Feet once again of Him Who chose me, confessing how much is still wanting in me.

2*nd Prelude.* Grace to consider my Vocation.

Point I.—"See your Vocation" (1 Cor. i. 26)

Let me look at it: consider it, look back a year—perhaps many years—to that day when I first entered the House of God; look back farther still to that moment when for the first time I realized my Vocation—realized that I was being called by my King to join His Company, to fight under His banner, to march always under the standard of the Cross. As I call to mind my fervour, my zeal, my good-will, my determination that *everything* should be for Him Who had been so good as to choose me, what does it look like? *Has* everything been for Him? Have all my desires and affections been tending towards Him? Has the "*I*" been steadily *decreasing* that my King might *increase* in me? Has everything been done, everything been

borne for Him? "You are not your own" (1 Cor. vi. 20): have I realized it—realized that I belong to Him—that my *body* belongs to Him as well as my soul, and that, therefore, for example, the amount of care bestowed upon my health is His concern, not mine? Have I realized that I am in His House, not in my own, and that I cannot use things without permission—*His* permission—that I must have a profound respect for everybody who lives there, because they are members of the King's household —that every single thing that I have to do in His House is hallowed? Have I not sometimes forgotten how earnestly I once cried: "I would rather be an abject in the House of my God, I do not mind what I do if only I may be of the happy number of His chosen ones"? Have I always taken the place of the abject? Oh, let me be quiet for a little and consider my Vocation; for I fear that I must oftentimes have been a disappointment to Him Who called me to my high calling. Is it to *me* that the Bridegroom is speaking: "I have something against thee because thou hast left thy first charity. Be mindful, do penance and do the *first* works"? (Apoc. ii. 4, 5.)

Point II.—"Walk Worthy of your Vocation" (Eph. iv. 1–4)

The voice of St. Paul, who understood so well what a vocation meant, reaches us across nearly twenty centuries, and on the day when I am thinking

of my vocation he says to me: "I *beseech* you that you walk worthy of it." We can almost hear the tone of appeal in his voice, as though he would make us understand (1) how possible it is to have a vocation and not to walk worthy of it, and (2) how infinitely important it is that we should do our part, now that GOD has done His. "I, a prisoner in the Lord, I who am in bonds myself and know full well how they chafe, I beseech you walk worthy of your vocation."

And then he tells us *how* to walk worthy—

1. "*With all humility.*" The old thing over again. I hear so much about it that I sometimes feel a little weary of it, so I will only just notice that St. Paul puts it down as the *first* thing to be aimed at if I would walk worthy of my vocation, and I will remind myself again of what I know so well in theory—that the *only* way of attaining to humility is by the road of humiliations.

2. "*With mildness and patience.*" What endless scope there is for these virtues in the House of God! And if I would walk worthy of my vocation I have got—not to admire them in others but—to practise them myself, to copy my Divine Spouse, to be mild and patient always, no matter how tiresome and trying people and circumstances may be. These are simply the exercises, the drill which He gives me in His House to develop my character and make me less unworthy to be His Spouse. The difficulty I find in practising only proves my need of the drill,

and how right He was in His choice of these particular exercises for me.

3. "*Supporting one another in charity.*" To what extent do I bear with others in charity? Where am I with regard to this greatest of all virtues? Why do I find forbearance so difficult? Alas! it all comes from want of charity. Two thoughts will help me: (1) That my Divine Spouse is always bearing with *me*. Surely if He with all His purity and holiness can bear with *me*, I who am at least as trying to others as they are to me, and quite possibly more so, ought to be able to bear with them. (2) That *He* is always bearing with others, because He loves them, because He died for them, because He has given them a vocation, because He is training them for Himself. Let me try to look at them with His eyes, and I shall not find charity so difficult. I shall cease to criticize, grumble, find fault and tell tales. I shall do all that I can to help Him to make these souls, so dear to Him, all that He would have them be, instead of spoiling His work in myself and in them by my want of charity. Walk worthy, says St. Paul, of your vocation, and remember you will never do it without charity.

4. *Be "careful to keep the unity of the Spirit."* What is this but the common life—the being bound in one bundle by the Holy Spirit, so that we make but one body as we are all "called in one hope"? Did St. Paul know even then what a daily martyrdom that common life often is? What a splendid

opportunity it gives for mortification, for death to self and to all one's brilliant ideas? It looks like it, for he says "*Be careful,*" do not imagine that you can walk worthy of your vocation unless you have a real devotion and a great fidelity to the common life.

Point III.—Some Encouragements

Am I disposed to say: "Who is sufficient for these things"? (2 Cor. ii. 16.) The Master does not need the sufficient. Listen to the description of those whom He calls: not the wise and mighty and noble —at any rate "not many of them"; but the *foolish*, the *weak*, the *base*, the *contemptible*, those *that are not* (those annihilated, selfless beings whom we meet so often during our Meditations and so seldom at any other time!). Need I fear my insufficiency? Not if I can manage to keep myself in this class that the world despises. The young ruler went away sorrowful because he could not. He dare not give up all that the world holds dear and make himself foolish and contemptible in its eyes, it was too much of a venture. "How hardly!" "Not many!" And yet He called *me* and He gave *me* the grace to make the venture. Why does He want me thus stripped of everything? St. Paul explains—it is because *He* wants to have all the glory. He would have *Ad majorem Dei gloriam* to be the motto of all those who are consecrated to Him, and it cannot be unless they understand that the "foolishness of

God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men " (ver. 25).

So I see that He wants of me now just what He wanted at first, when He invited me to *leave all* and follow Him. He wants me to be stripped—to be poor, little, humble, weak, dependent, distrustful of myself. So shall I walk worthy of my vocation, and He will be able to use me for the purpose for which He chose me, namely, to " confound the wise and the strong," by making them confess that Christ, my Divine Spouse, is " the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Colloquy with Him Who called me.

Resolution. To walk worthy of my vocation.

Spiritual Bouquet. " We pray always for you, that our God would make you worthy of His Vocation, that the Name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you " (St. Paul ; 2 Thess. i. 11, 12).

THE BRIDAL DRESS

(*For Renewal of Vows*)

"*See whether it be thy son's coat or not*" (Gen. xxxvii. 32).

1*st Prelude.* At the Feet of my Bridegroom Who is showing me the robe.

2*nd Prelude.* The grace to be faithful.

Point I.—The Bridegroom's Question

It was such a beautiful robe that I gave you on that glad day when joy filled both our hearts, and I gave it you that all might know that I had picked you out amongst many to be the favoured one, and that I loved you with a special love—your bridal dress—the robe of your second Baptism. I gave it you to make you comely in My eyes, that I might be able to say, "Thou art all fair, there is no spot in thee" (Cant. iv. 7). Look well at the robe—is it the same? do you recognize it? and remember that I, your Bridegroom, am jealous.

Point II.—The Bride's Answer

Yes, it is indeed the same precious robe that Thou didst give me. I recognize it, I acknowledge it, "an evil beast hath done this" (ver. 33), "going about

seeking whom he may devour," (1 Pet. v. 8) he has caught me off my guard and left the mark of his teeth—the mark of the beast (Apoc. xvi. 2) upon my beautiful Bridal dress. Now "I will go down to the grave mourning." It is true it is the beast's work, but "*mea culpa*"—had I been more watchful, he could not have approached me. These stains are caused by my carelessness and infidelity, by my self-sufficiency and want of attention to *little* things. I forgot how terribly the least stain shows on a Bridal dress—that what others may do with impunity the Bride of Christ cannot do. It is *spoilt*—what can I do? Must I "continue weeping" as Jacob did, "without comfort"?

Point III.—The Bridegroom's Consolation

No, "as one whom his mother caresseth so will I comfort you" (Isaias lxvi. 13). Your tears of contrition make reparation for the pain and disappointment you have given Me. I will do the rest—it is my special work "to comfort all that mourn." I will give you "a crown for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning and a garment of praise for the spirit of grief" (Is. lxi. 2, 3). "Arise, put on again the garments of thy glory—shake thyself from the dust" (Is. lii. 1, 2). "I remember thee and the love of thy espousals, when thou followedst Me in the desert" (Jer. iii. 2). Come and let us renew everything, and I will restore you your beautiful Bridal dress as spotless as at first.

I love you to come and renew your vows, and you cannot come too often, they are the contract between you and Me. "*Vovete et reddite*" (Vow and pay). Remember always the two parts—it is the paying that keeps the contract true, and the union between us close.

Colloquy with my Heavenly Bridegroom, Who is so ready to forgive.

Resolution. Not to allow the least stain on my Bridal dress.

Spiritual Bouquet. "I have remembered thee and the love of thy espousals."

THE FIG-TREE (1)

"*I have chosen you that you should go and should bring forth fruit*" (St. John xv. 16).

1*st Prelude.* The fig-tree in the vineyard (St. Luke xiii. 6-9).
2*nd Prelude.* Grace not to disappoint the Owner of the vineyard.

Point I.—The Transplanting

"A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard." Such is the picture, and we can well imagine the care and the pains and the interest which that man bestowed upon the little tree which he took the trouble to have transplanted into his vineyard.

I am that fig-tree, transplanted from the world into God's own vineyard to live and grow there under His eyes, to have His special care, and to be surrounded by all that can help me to be what He intends and expects me to be. Why did He bestow all this attention on *me?* The more I think over it all, the greater seems to be the wonder. He had to go so far to fetch me, and there were others so close that they were living almost in the same soil as the vineyard. I did not ask to come, nor perhaps even want to do so, while others seem to spend their

lives in begging and longing to come in. The age of the tree, its strong and deep roots, the atmosphere it had always been accustomed to, its attachment to its own soil—all these considerations made the transplanting a very risky process in the eyes of lookers-on. But the Owner of the vineyard did not consult them. All that He was heard to say, as the spade went in deeper and deeper, severing one by one each little rootlet from its much-loved soil, was, "*I have chosen you out of the world*" (St. John xv. 19).

And as I look back at it, that is the only possible solution to the mystery. How can I thank Him enough for that transplanting which cost me so much at the time! How many dangers outside, which I was quite unaware of, has it saved me from! And it has given me the inestimable privilege of living side by side with my Divine Spouse, thinking of nothing else but how I may please Him. O my God, I thank Thee for my Vocation.

Point II.—The Fruit

"He came seeking fruit on it." This He had every right to do, for though He transplanted the fig-tree because He chose it and loved it, and wanted it in His vineyard, He did not force it to come nor transplant it against its will. He gave it a special call, a special chance and said that He was ready to put it in His vineyard—His form of invitation was, "*If thou wilt be perfect, come.* I have chosen you

that you should bring forth fruit." And the fig-tree by its very presence in the vineyard acknowledges that the terms were accepted—that it does want to be perfect and that it has pledged itself to bring forth fruit.

So I cannot be surprised if from time to time the Master of the vineyard comes seeking for fruit, seeking to know whether the object for which He chose me is being steadily and faithfully kept in view. Love made Him seek me at first, and it is still love that makes Him seek to see whether His great love is being reciprocated.

"*And He found none!*" What a terrible disappointment to His loving Heart! What base ingratitude! What infidelity! It seems hardly credible. But He records the fact Himself, and I am bound to believe not only that it is possible, but that in some cases He has found it true.

Do not let me be too ready to say that these terrible words do not apply to me. It is possible—and our Blessed Lord spoke this parable to bring the lesson home—for Him to come to look for fruit where He has the greatest right to expect it, and to *find none.* The tree may not be altogether without fruit, but the Master's searching eyes are seeking for some *particular* fruit, and He is disappointed. The fig-tree knows well enough what it is. He has asked so often for that particular fruit, but it is not there yet! He finds some fruit, but very little come to perfection. He does not find that persistent, un-

remitting, untiring effort after perfection that He had hoped for. He does not find such an exactitude about *little* things as He found at first. He finds a few fruits of zeal—yes, but as His scrutinizing eye rests on these, I notice with shame and confusion what I know He is noticing too—that nearly all the bloom has been taken off them for self! Souls have been attracted to self rather than to Him.

Oh, can it be true that there is *no* fruit with which He is really pleased—which is altogether His, grown solely to give Him pleasure? Even so, there is one thing that happily it is not too late to do—I can water the root with the dew of my contrition, and the sunshine of His Presence may work wonders even yet in the fruit.

Colloquy with my Divine Spouse, asking Him for grace to strive to bring forth fruit to perfection.

Resolution. To give Him that particular fruit that He has been disappointed about, the next time He comes.

Spiritual Bouquet. "He came seeking fruit."

THE FIG-TREE (2)

"*He that abideth in Me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit*" (St. John xv. 5).

1*st Prelude.* The consultation over the fig-tree.
2*nd Prelude.* Grace to listen and take heed.

Point I.—The Master's Complaint

"Behold, for these three years I come seeking fruit on this tree, and I find none." This is not the first time, then, by any means, that He has come, and gone away disappointed. Long years He has been seeking and waiting. And now He Who is patience itself, He Who is so ready to make excuses saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not," He Who never breaks the bruised reed, nor quenches the smoking flax, He says, "*Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?*" Take it away, I have given it every chance, I have given it a vocation and a thousand aids to enable it to fulfil it; but it is no good: why should it take up the room of another who will serve Me far better and give Me the fruit I long to have?

Point II.—The Dresser's Pleading

Who is this "Dresser of the Vineyard" to whom the Owner is making His complaint? The one to

whose care He confided the tree. It may be my Guardian Angel, it may be Our Lady herself, it may be my Patron Saint. Any—yea, all—of these have taken such an interest in my Vocation, and have taken such infinite pains to make me correspond to it, that the Owner could hardly cut down the tree without consulting them. For very shame I dare not look up, for I know how many things can be brought up against me. The " dressers " know only too well that if I had chosen to co-operate with their efforts the fruit would have been so different. But what blessed, consoling words do I hear: " Lord, let it alone this year also ! " It is my Mother's voice pleading, I recognize it, and I know that her request will be granted.

A reprieve ! another chance ! Not yet have my friends in Heaven given me up. My Master has consented to try me again—" this year also." That little word " *also* " has a sting in it, for it means that it is not the first time that Mary has pleaded, not the first time that " God had mercy with regard to the evil which He had said that He would do, and He did it not " (Jonas iii. 10). Oh, what shall I do with this precious year ? Surely I shall strain every nerve to repay such infinite goodness and patience ! And surely nothing that I have to suffer will be too much, so great will be my desire to make reparation and to show my gratitude, by bringing forth the fruit that the Master is seeking.

Point III.—The Treatment

"Until I dig about it and dung it." Leave it alone, pleads the Dresser, till I have tried a special treatment, and let us see whether under that it will bring forth fruit.

What is this treatment that the Owner of the Vineyard has given His consent to? A laying bare of the roots, followed by the application of manure and rich soil. It is in the root that lurks the mischief—my interior life, that hidden life on which all fruit-bearing depends, is not what it should be. I must be stripped of all self-love, self-esteem, and self-dependence, and after the stripping the Dresser will apply such remedies as the world holds vile and contemptible—humiliations, slights, injuries, affronts, false accusations, failures. Then the Holy Spirit will be able to touch me, in this rich soil He can do His work and the Master will no longer seek in vain for fruit.

Point IV.—After That!

If *after that* there is no fruit, then Thou shalt cut it down. There is a point then beyond which even the Dresser, with all a Mother's yearning for the Vocation of her child, cannot go. If, after this drastic treatment, things are no better, then I have nothing more to plead.

Oh, my Mother, it is enough—never, never again will I break your heart! Do with your child what you will, I will not murmur at your treatment. I

know that what you want to see in me is an increasing likeness to your Son, Who has deigned to make me His Spouse. I wear His livery, which means that I must follow Him. He endured for me an excess of suffering and humiliation. I am ready, at least, to *try* to copy Him. No matter what it costs me in the things that always hurt self most, He *shall* have the fruit that He wants, the fruit He intended to have when He chose me. I thank Thee, O Most Gracious Advocate, for having once more turned Thine eyes of mercy on me. I will not disappoint Thee again. Keep me only in close contact with Thy Son, for He says: "He that abideth in Me bringeth forth much fruit" (St. John xv. 4, 16).

Colloquy with the Owner and with the Dresser of the Vineyard.

Resolution. To bring forth that particular fruit about which I have again disappointed Him.

Spiritual Bouquet. "Let it alone this year also."

THE RULE

"*Quod minimum est minimum est; sed in minimo fidelem esse magnum est*" (*A small thing is but a small thing, but to be faithful in a small thing is a great thing*). (St. Augustine.)

1*st Prelude.* A picture of St. John Berchmans, who was canonized for fidelity to his Rule.

2*nd Prelude.* The grace to love my Rule.

Point I.—My Rule Book

That precious directory, or guide, which tells me in detail how to conduct myself in the House of my Royal Spouse. Here I find minute directions about all my duties and about my relations with all those who live in the House. It is the inner lining of the Vows, which serves two purposes, as all linings do—it preserves the Vows and it keeps the heart of its owner warm and fervent.

There are two ways of regarding the Rule. I can either say: The Rule does not bind under pain of sin. I keep it, of course, sufficiently not to fall out of line. I do what the others do, but as to troubling about all those little insignificant details, I see there a danger of becoming narrow-minded—a thing I set my face against when I entered Religion. Or I can say, as I take up my Rule Book, with

infinite reverence: This is the book that my Divine Spouse has written for *me*, and He has given me a copy of it all to myself. He has taken the trouble to go into all these little tiny (not *insignificant*, He is too great to do anything insignificant) details, because He wants, if I will let Him, to train every part of me for Himself, not only my soul and my spirit, but even my body. The very charm of the Rule lies in the fact that it does not bind under pain of sin. The methods of my Divine Spouse are always the same, He never forces. His method with regard to the Rule is the same as that by which He enticed me at first. *If thou wilt be perfect, come.* You *can* be a lukewarm Religious and yet save your soul; you can, if you like, keep your Rule just sufficiently to save outward appearances, but *if you will be perfect*, if you will be the kind of Religious that I want, the kind that *ravishes My Heart*, you will *come* often to your Rule Book, saying: I want to do this or to say that, or to keep this Rule of Modesty exactly as my Beloved would have me; here I shall find what He says about it, what He wishes about it.

If you will be perfect, come, take your Rule, love it, venerate it, live by it, let it penetrate you through and through; remember that every word in it is written with a purpose. Whenever you are in doubt, let your first thought be: What does my Rule say? Consult it, follow it, cleave to it, let it be your close companion till your death. It is told of a holy Religious that when he was dying he experienced a

terrible time of desolation and even doubt. Nothing gave him any comfort, not even his Crucifix. But when his Rule Book was put into his hands a perfect peace took possession of his soul. Every true Religious understands this—the story needs neither explanation nor defence.

Can I ever value my Rule Book enough? After the Bible, surely it is the book of books for me. How precious every word of it is—even its antiquated style is sacred to me. Oh, my JESUS, how lovingly do I thank Thee for it, and how sorrowfully I have to confess that I have sometimes found its little details irksome, and that I have even been unfaithful in following them.

Point II.—THE SPIRIT OF THE INSTITUTE

This is guarded by the Rule, expressed by the Rule, contained in the Rule, and can only be learned by observing the Rule. How jealous I ought to be of the spirit of the Institute to which I belong! The Rule was written by its Founders and expresses their spirit, their ideas, the means by which they wished their children to attain perfection. How sad it is when a Religious loses the spirit of her Institute! She soon becomes one apart, she does not understand the little delicacies and refinements which oil the wheels in Community and make the lives of the others run so smoothly in spite of the same difficulties which she finds

insurmountable. She is a false and jarring note which spoils the harmony. Such a one is indeed to be pitied! Yes, but is she not to be blamed also? is it not her own fault? Is not her sad state due to the fact that she has allowed herself to be negligent about her Rule? Little by little she has let herself down from the standard which her "high calling" expects from her—her health would not allow this, her time that, her peculiar digestion made such a thing out of the question, her gentle upbringing another—and so on *ad infinitum.* Is it wonderful that the distance between such a Religious and her Rule is ever increasing? There is very little affinity between them, and no love. She has lost the spirit of her Institute, and sad to say, this fact is sometimes so patent that those outside can notice it. The world is quick to detect what is false and what is true. What discredit such a Religious brings on the House of God, on all those in it—yea, on our Divine Lord Himself!

"Better far to live not quite so long, or not enjoy such good health, and do all with the Community, than live to a great age in robust health by means of dispensations and privileges" (Father Balthazar Alverez).

Oh, let me be scrupulously careful to guard the Spirit of my Institute, holding all the little traditions and customs as a sacred trust, not to be despised, not to be tampered with, not to be altered, not to be lost. And this can only be by diving ever more

and more deeply into my Rule and striving to observe its smallest details and hints.

Point III.—Dispensations

A Religious who is penetrated with the spirit of her Rule will never allow herself to be an exception even in exterior things if she can possibly avoid it, but will strive to conform to all the innumerable little customs and ways of doing things—ways which are new to her and probably not at all to her taste, but which she gladly adopts, recognizing them as Court etiquette and saying humbly when she is reproved for tripping in her manners: "Pardon me. I am not used to living in a Palace." She will be very diffident, too, about asking for a dispensation. When she considers that there is a real necessity she will, after having talked the matter over with her Divine Spouse, go to His representative in a spirit of humility and submission, desiring with her whole heart—not the dispensation, but the will of God in the matter, and being fully persuaded that that will will be expressed by the decision of her Superior. *Not* to ask for a dispensation when there seems to be a necessity would be to yield to the temptation of human respect or of a love of self, shown in the desire to appear regular at any cost, even at that of breaking the Rule! for it is the Rule which says that in certain cases a dispensation must be asked for.

If this is the way the Rule guards itself from

infringement, how careful I ought to be to guard it and its spirit! The older I am in Religion, the greater will be the temptation to become lax and to allow myself to think too readily that certain exemptions are necessary for me now. Let me face courageously this very real temptation, and counteract it by redoubling my fervour, by going back to my Novitiate days and being *at least* as particular now as I was then about such things as asking permissions, giving and receiving little presents, joining in the Common Life. The Rule has not changed since I was a Novice, and as the time is approaching when I shall have to give an account of how I have kept it, it behoves me surely to be *more* watchful, *more* faithful, *more* loving, than I ever have been.

The faithful Religious who is obliged to live for a time apart from her Community will not be glad of her freedom and of the exemptions that necessarily ensue from her changed circumstances, but will unite herself, as far as possible, in spirit with her Community, keeping where she can the same hours. These are little things, no doubt, but they are infallible tests as to whether the Rule, the Common Life and the Spirit of the Institute are really valued.

The life according to Rule is a tremendous *safeguard*, and if I am outside it through no fault of my own, it is incumbent upon me by my fervour and fidelity, punctuality and recollection, to do

all I can to make up for the loss of that safeguard. And for my consolation I may remember two things: (1) that to be where Obedience places me is not to be outside the Rule though I may be outside the life according to Rule; and (2) that my Divine Spouse Who has permitted —yea, arranged—so many exemptions and *deprivations*, too, for one of His chosen ones, will Himself make up and more than make up for all that is *apparently* lost.

Colloquy with my Divine Spouse, Who says to me, as He said once to another of His spouses—Blessed Margaret Mary—"Look with suspicion on everything that interferes with the exact observance of the Rule to which it is My will that thou shouldst give the preference before everything else."

Resolution. To read and consult my Rule at any rate *as often* as I did when I was a Novice.

Spiritual Bouquet. "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater" (St. Luke xvi. 10).

MY ORDER OF THE DAY

"*Gather up the fragments that remain, lest they be lost*" (St. John vi. 12).

1*st Prelude.* St. John Berchmans again, intently studying his Rule.

2*nd Prelude.* Grace to understand the value of my Order of the Day.

Point I.—The Fragments

What are they? Broken pieces. The Divine Spouse takes the Rule and breaks it up small, and gives a few pieces to each of His chosen ones. With infinite care and love He chooses for each the pieces that are most suitable. He does not alter the Rule, but He expands it and applies it; and, as it were, locates it. He explains exactly where and when and how in each individual case the Rule is to be kept. Need I ask what these *Fragments* are—these pieces that a Hand of Love has so carefully broken for me? I recognize at once in them my *Order of the Day.* The Rule says that the spouses of Christ must be obedient—go where they are told and when they are told. My *Order of the Day* tells me exactly where to go—whether to the kitchen or the schoolroom, the chapel or the parlour, the infirmary or the garden—at what hours I am to

go and how long I am to stay. Nothing is left to my own choice, even the little exemptions which my Divine Spouse has allowed in my case are all included, and to them I owe as exact an obedience as I do to all the rest.

What is the reason for all these fragments which fill up my day? in other words, Why have I got an *Order of the Day?* There are reasons which are patent to every one, such as the necessity for order and punctuality and silence in the House of God, but I want to find out the more intimate reasons—those which touch the relationship between my Beloved and me His spouse.

(1) The first reason is, because He wants to know exactly where to find me at each moment of the day, and also He wants *me* to know exactly where to find *Him.* My *Order of the Day* is nothing more nor less than a list of *His Hours.* It is the Directory which tells me where and when I can meet Him.

(2) Because my *time* belongs to Him. I have nothing of my own, I have given Him all, and so it is quite natural that He should tell me exactly how He wishes every moment of it to be spent. And if He gives me a little of it back to use as I will, let me always remember that I have *no sort of right* to it, it is a gratuitous gift on the part of my Heavenly Spouse, for which I have to thank Him. This thought will put out of the question any discontent about the want of free time or the

shortness of it, or any jealousy because another has more of it than I have.

(3) Another reason for His giving me an *Order of the Day* is that He wants to make me dependent, and to teach me to take each hour—yea, each minute—from His Hands and to use it as He wills.

(4) The fourth reason is as a mortification, for if faithfully kept, the *Order of the Day* is a very fruitful source of mortification. Human nature loves to go straight on with the work in hand and to have no interruptions. "What a good day I have had—not one single interruption!" But such a day may not be the best day after all, at any rate it is not the kind of day that the Divine Spouse generally arranges for those consecrated to His special service. No, they are days of *fragments*. He knows how trying it is to have to break off just in the middle of a train of thought (the devil says it will never return!) or of some piece of work (the devil says it will be spoiled if not finished then!—as if *anything* could be spoiled by obedience!). He knows how trying it is to have to stop just because the specified time is up. And yet He is standing there at my side saying so wistfully: "I only gave you a *fragment*, My child; now I have brought you another—something quite different." What splendid opportunities my *Order of the Day* affords for mortifying that unruly will of mine which cries out so bitterly to be allowed "just to stop and finish"!

"Gather up the fragments"—they are all pre-

cious—all so much gold for eternity, coming from the Hand of Him Who not only gives liberally, but always chooses the *best* gifts.

Point II.—"LEST THEY BE LOST"

In what sense would the fragments be lost if I did not gather them up: that is, if I were not particular about my *Order of the Day?*

(1) I should lose that perfect union of thought and heart with my Divine Spouse which He intended my *Order of the Day* to foster. He has arranged there for me to begin a certain duty at a certain time in a certain place; He has made an appointment with me. And if I (through negligence) am not there, or am late, or have changed the order of my duties without permission, do not I lose that precious fragment which He broke for me? *He* was there—He always keeps His appointments—He had something special to say to me and He came to say it: but I was following my own sweet will elsewhere! The fragment was so tiny, I did not take the trouble to pick it up, I meant to do so at another time when it was more convenient, or when I considered that it would fit in better—and now it is *lost.*

(2) I should misuse His time—waste it—*lose* it. I should be acting against the spirit of Holy Poverty which demands *all*—even my time. I should be taking back some of my gift, climbing down off the ladder of Holy Poverty which I set up as a means

of attaining perfection. *He* wanted that broken fragment of time for a certain purpose, and instead of gathering it up for Him I have used it for myself. It is *lost* as far as He is concerned.

(3) I should lose an opportunity of practising *dependence*—a virtue which my Beloved wishes so much to see developed in His spouses because it crushes self and leaves more room for Him, it keeps them little, humble and obedient. Every time that I deliberately change my *Order of the Day* without permission I show a spirit of independence, and once again I lose the fragment that my Divine Spouse had broken for me.

(4) I lose also an opportunity for *mortification*, and I cannot afford to lose even *one*, for a Religious must be mortified. An unmortified Religious! the thing is not possible, the mere thought of it is unthinkable. I have only to look at my crucified Spouse to see that—and I have nailed myself to the cross with Him. Am I going deliberately to loosen the nails? Surely not—whatever it may cost me I will gather up the precious fragments—rugged, sharp and dangerous even (to the flesh) though some of them may be—not *one* of them shall be lost.

Point III.—"PEACE I GIVE UNTO YOU"

Peace reigns in the soul when the *Order of the Day* is kept, for it is a safeguard against all doubts and scruples, all murmurings and discontent, all

hesitation and regret. Why? Because with each fragment my Beloved gives me His peace, and my day consists in gathering up the fragments—in increasing the peace of my soul. How supernatural it all is! the very things which disturb my peace naturally are those which increase it supernaturally! What am I come into Religion for? *To do God's will*—that is all—and the expression of that will for *me* lies hidden in my *Order of the Day*. It changes little by little my will into God's will and enables me to see things from His point of view. For example: I do not like this particular duty, but as my *Order of the Day* tells me to do it, I *do* like it supernaturally. Another hour would suit me better than this, but my *Order of the Day* says: Do it at *this* hour, and so this hour suits me best supernaturally. I can never get on with that particular Religious, we always rub each other up the wrong way; but my *Order of the Day* bids me work by her side, and so I do *quite* happily because supernaturally. I do not like that particular thing which seems so often to find its way to my place at table; but when I remember that it is what my Beloved has chosen for me I would not exchange it for all the dishes in the world—I *like* it supernaturally. At every moment of the day I am where obedience places me, doing what obedience bids me. What better preparation could I have for Heaven, and what perfect peace is mine on earth! Precious, precious fragments! I need have

no higher ambition than to spend my life in gathering them up that not one of them be lost.

Colloquy with my Heavenly Spouse.

Resolution. To value more than I have done my *Order of the Day.*

Spiritual Bouquet. "Gather up the fragments, lest they be lost."

SILENCE

"*A time to keep silence, and a time to speak*" (Eccles. iii. 7).

1st Prelude. A picture of St. Joseph.
2nd Prelude. The grace to love silence.

Point I.—The Silence of St. Joseph

If ever any man had good reasons from every point of view for talking it was St. Joseph. Never had any one such great things to talk about, and never had any one such sympathetic and interested listeners. What opportunities St. Joseph had! How we should have used them had we been in his place! We feel impatient sometimes with those who talk little, and are inclined to think that they are wasting their opportunities of imparting or acquiring knowledge. Perhaps we should have blamed St. Joseph too! But now we are going to Nazareth, not to criticize, but to learn the value of silence.

There is only one recorded occasion on which the Divine Word spoke there, two are recorded of the Blessed Mother, but of St. Joseph not one word is recorded. It looks rather as though those

whom God allows to live closest to JESUS and Mary are the silent ones.

We live close to them—in their very house, and we hope to be saints one day too; let us then follow in the steps of the saints and practise silence. St. Francis Borgia says: "Give me a Community which practises silence and I will canonize every member of it."

There are three occasions in St. Joseph's life in which his silence is most marked.

(1) During that terrible time when he was obliged to have suspicions about Mary. Who can tell what that trial must have been to him after the Vows of Chastity which they had both made! But he did not allow himself to say one word to her, he made up his mind to put her away privately. What must this resolution have cost him! And what were Mary's sufferings at this moment! She knew all that Joseph was going through, and with one word she could not only have put an end to his anxiety, but also have justified herself in his eyes. But Mary does not say the word, her secret was more GOD'S than hers, and she leaves it to Him. O marvellous silence of the Saints!

(2) When the Angel woke up St. Joseph in the night with the news that the Holy Child's life was in danger, and that he must fly at once with the Mother and Child into Egypt and remain there as long as GOD told him. Surely now St. Joseph will say something? No, not one word escapes him.

All we are told is that "he arose and took the Child and His Mother by night." What wonders GOD can work through His children if only they will be silent and leave all the arrangements of their lives in His Hands without asking any questions!

(3) When the Holy Child was lost for three days, what anguish St. Joseph must have suffered! Perhaps in one way, more than the Holy Mother herself, for he, as head of the household, would blame himself for possible want of care, and then his anguish was increased a thousandfold by having to witness the intense grief of her whom GOD had given him to shield and protect. And yet what do we read about it? That he "*wondered*," that he "*sorrowed*," that he "*did not understand*," but not that he *spoke*. *We* should consider wonder, sorrow and not understanding three very good reasons for speaking, but St. Joseph found in them three very good reasons for *silence*.

Oh, how many secrets the village carpenter had, locked up in his breast; but none of those who came to his shop guessed them. His life was wholly interior, and it was the precious virtue of silence which guarded it.

Point II.—MY RULE OF SILENCE

Now do I begin to see why my Divine Spouse lays such stress upon the Rule of Silence which I perhaps find so irksome? In what other way could lessons of self-control, of patience, humility,

modesty, recollection, charity, cheerfulness under suffering, meekness under reproof, absolute confidence in God, be learnt half so surely? It is this rule which helps to produce and to preserve that interior silence which my Divine Spouse loves. He wants His House into which He has put me to follow the same rule as the one He lived in at Nazareth. Why? Because He wants His communion with His chosen ones to be uninterrupted; He wants to be sure of being heard when He speaks, and He wants all *their* words to be for Him. "The glory of the King's daughter is *within*" (Ps. xliv. 14), and it is there in her *heart* that the King will look for it, not in her speech, though she may be a very *Chrysostom* in the eyes of the little world in which she lives. If I want my Beloved to "speak to my heart," let me value my Rule of Silence. Without it a spirit of prayer and recollection can never be maintained, without it I should miss many a precious secret which my Divine Spouse would confide to me.

If I am faithful in my examen I shall be surprised to find how many of the little infidelities which pain the Heart of my Divine Spouse may be traced to a laxity about my Rule of Silence. My silence if it is to be worth anything must be *to* God and *for* God. "Be silent to the Lord" (Ps. xxxvii. 7). Interior silence is not compatible with curiosity, love of praise, letting the imagination wander where it will; neither is it possible where there is

a spirit of criticism or contradiction or a love of argument and insistence—all of which are dangerously near to a want of charity. Interior silence will not allow a grievance to be turned over and over in the mind, nor will it allow a constant reversion to some word of praise. It creates a calmness of soul where all discontented, impatient, rebellious thoughts, all such things as grievances and slights and wounded feelings, are out of place. A calm *exterior* is not everything for those who are being "silent to the Lord." Let me make my Rule of Silence what it is intended to be—a preparation for "the silence of Heaven" (Apoc. viii. 1), where all is interior and where the sound of "great voices" (chap. xi. 15) is only the intense interiorness making itself felt and heard.

Colloquy with Joseph, who "sorrowed," and Mary, who "pondered," in silence, and with JESUS, the silent Word; asking them to increase in me a love for silence, and to help me never to allow earth's many voices to stifle my interior life.

Resolution. To let my Rule of Silence form a serious part of my Examinations of Conscience.

Spiritual Bouquet. "There was silence in Heaven."

CONFORMITY

"*Sicut aqua effusus sum*" (*I am poured out like water*). (Ps. xxi. 15.)

1*st Prelude.* A number of vessels—the same size, but different shapes.

2*nd Prelude.* The grace of conformity.

Point I.—The Soul that is poured out like Water

It is my Divine Spouse Who says: "I am poured out like water," and as I am bound, as far as I can, to copy Him, I must try to see what He means. He is referring to His Passion, where He poured out His whole self—soul and body—to His Father. "Behold, I come to do Thy will, O My God. I have desired it" (Ps. xxxix. 7–9). "Not My will but Thine be done." From the first moment of Its creation in the womb of His Mother till, with the words, "Father, into Thy Hands I commend My Spirit," It went back to Him Who gave It, His soul was *poured out*—there were no dregs left in the chalice.

How can my soul be poured out like water? Is it possible? Let me think of some of the characteristics of water poured out. The most obvious

thing to notice about it is that it always *takes the form* of the vessel into which it is poured. If the vessel is flat and shallow, the form of the water is flat and shallow; if it is poured into a deep, narrow vessel, its form is deep and narrow; the vessel may be square or round, smooth or indented: no matter, the water always accommodates itself to the form of its vessel. Next, the water is *visible* or *invisible* according to the vessel into which it is poured: should the vessel be transparent, the water can be seen by all; should it be opaque, the water is so completely hidden that no one suspects its existence. Thirdly, think of the *indifference* of the water—whether the vessel into which it is poured is commonplace and ugly, or handsome and a delight to the eye, it is all the same to the water. "I am poured out like water." My Divine Spouse could say it, for He was absolutely dependent on GOD'S will and plans for Him, and absolutely conformable to them. But can *I* say it? How far do I accommodate myself to the various persons, work, places, general surroundings that GOD arranges for me? Sometimes it is the broad, shallow vessel of *consolation* that He pours me into, sometimes the deep, narrow vessel of *desolation*. Sometimes He chooses for me a transparent vessel where all that I do can be seen and known, where success and praise are my continual portion, where I taste perhaps such popularity as He Himself experienced at rare intervals: "All men come to Him," the disciples

of John tell their master (St. John iii. 26); and near the end of His life the Pharisees complain: "Behold the whole world is gone after Him" (St. John xii. 19). Or again, He plunges me into obscurity and makes me understand and share something of the hiddenness and solitude of Nazareth or of the desolation and abandonment of the cross—the vessel is so opaque that nobody knows or cares anything about me, or seems even to know that I am there. Sometimes the vessel He pours me into is in itself attractive—the work that I am doing is so artistic, so beautiful, that it cannot fail to attract attention and interest; sometimes, on the other hand, the work He entrusts me with is unattractive, repellent—work that nobody would do from choice. Why does GOD treat me thus? and seem almost, if we may say it reverently, to amuse Himself by pouring me from vessel to vessel? Because He is the Master of souls and He wants them to be like water in His Hands—*conformable* to His will.

If my soul is like water it will quietly fit into whatever form is arranged for it. There will be no complaining, no arguing, no reasoning, no comparing one vessel with another, nor the vessels of others with its own. No, nothing of this, but just a perfect trust in the Master's guiding Hand and watchful, loving Eye. "I am poured out like water," and though often I do not like the process, I will always remember that there is Some One Who

is pouring and that He never makes mistakes in the vessels He chooses.

A soul that is "poured out like water," then, has its will lost in GOD'S will—it no longer has any will, any judgment, any ideas, methods, plans of its own—that is to say, *apart from God's*. It may, certainly, form its own ideas, have its own point of view, its own methods, plans, desires and hopes, but directly somebody, who stands for that soul in the place of GOD, puts before it other plans, other methods, other sets of ideas, it immediately drops its own and adopts these—it is *conformable*. How greatly the burdens of Superiors would be lightened if all the souls committed to their charge could be "poured out like water"!

Point II.—THE SOUL THAT IS NOT POURED OUT LIKE WATER

What happens when the opposite is the case? What would happen if the water refused to be poured? Suppose that some of the drops were to stop and complain and argue with the pourer: Why do you pour me out? the other shaped vessel suited me much better, I shall have no scope in this new one for my talents, I shall not be able to do this and that; why cannot I be left alone, or at least told *why* this change is being made? What would happen to the arguing drops? They would get spilt and be left behind, and the whole form would be altered in consequence. Even so will it

be with the soul who stops to argue and reason—the soul which has not learned the meaning of the word *conformable*. It will be *spilt*—it will waste its opportunities and miss its occasions of grace; it will get *left behind*—left out of that particular plan that God had in hand. He must look for another, with fewer ideas of its own, to do His work; and, worst of all, the *form* will be altered—God's beautiful design that He made for that soul will be changed, not realized. He will be disappointed, He cannot do what He will—what He had *intended* to do—He cannot bring it to the state of perfection that He had wished, and all because it stopped to argue, to reason, to object! It—little puny thing that it is—could not bring itself to be *conformable*—and conformable *to God!* How infinitely wiser are the little drops of water than we!

Point III.—The Result of Conformity

The soul that can arrive at this blissful state of conformity to God's will is always happy and contented, peaceful and humble, without any care or anxiety or worry. God's will is always its will, nothing can possibly happen that it does not like. It has *naturally* its likes and preferences, but to these, as soon as it is declared, God's will is preferred, and it likes supernaturally what it dislikes naturally. For example: I like this way of doing things; I have had a good deal of experience and have invariably found that this method answers

admirably. Quite right and praiseworthy till I am poured into *another* vessel—that is, till some one perhaps with far less experience than I have, but who happens to be to me in the place of GOD, comes and says: "You are doing that all wrong; *this* is the way you ought to do it!" My whole being rises up in revolt, and I am ready with a thousand reasons and arguments! If, however, I am conformable I shall not give *one* of them, but shall quietly allow myself to be poured out like water; and laying aside all my pet methods and theories, I shall take the form of the new vessel into which GOD is pouring me, trying my best to stifle all regrets and longings for the old differently-shaped one. Oh, how such a process cuts at the very root of self-love! What mortification that I arrange for myself can equal it! How thankful I ought to be that from time to time GOD pours me out like water, and how full of compunction as I remember how often I have refused to be poured!

With a conformable soul GOD can do as He likes. He can work at its perfection without any let or hindrance; He can send it consolation or desolation, health or sickness, success or failure, praise or blame, work it likes or work it does not like, change of place, change of Superior—no matter what: whatever He thinks good for it, without ever consulting it or its feelings, because He is sure of that soul, He can count on it; it is conformable to His will.

Colloquy. Act of Conformity to God's Will. O my God, I thank Thee for what Thou givest, I thank Thee for what Thou withholdest, I thank Thee for what Thou withdrawest. May Thy holy and most blessed will be done in and by me and mine, for ever, in all circumstances and at all times. Amen.

Resolution. To be absolutely conformable in everything—at least to-day.

Spiritual Bouquet. "I am poured out like water."

FRATERNAL CHARITY

"Imagine that your brethren are so many sculptors, hammer and chisel in hand, and that you are placed before them like a block of stone intended in the designs of God to be fashioned into a statue representing the Man of Sorrows, reproducing in every feature Christ crucified" (St. John of the Cross).

1*st Prelude.* A block of stone.
2*nd Prelude.* The grace not to flinch.

Point I.—The Block and the Design

There stands the block, hard, shapeless, uninteresting, unattractive—but the Master has chosen it; for Him it has an attraction, for Him it is full of interest, He sees in it both form and beauty, for as His Eyes of love and desire rest upon it He sees a likeness to His own Beloved Son in Whom He is well pleased. No wonder, then, that He places side by side with the block His design—*a statue representing the Man of Sorrows, reproducing in every feature Christ crucified.* And the block has got to be fashioned to the design.

He intends the likeness to His Son to be so evident in me that not only He can see it, but others also; He intends that all who have to do with me shall be instinctively reminded of Jesus.

And it is Jesus crucified, Jesus as the Man of Sorrows, Whom God intends me to represent. By my spirit of mortification, of self-sacrifice, of patience under trials—especially little ones; by my spirit of endurance, by my contentment and peace and calm, by the way I bear pain and suffering and little crosses generally, by my unselfishness—that is, managing somehow to get the worst for myself; by my readiness to forgive an injury, by my eagerness to say a word or do an act of charity, by my silence under accusation—and especially false accusation; by my humility shown in letting others help me: by these and all such I have got to stand out as the representative of Jesus crucified. If I am not doing so, if the likeness in me to my crucified Spouse is not sufficiently strong to strike others, there is something wrong, some mistake somewhere, for God's designs are evidently not being fulfilled in me.

Point II.—The Block and the Workmen

God has many ways of fashioning the block—one very favourite process is that of *Fraternal Charity*. He puts me into the workshop where I am surrounded by my brethren, and these by their charity, their affection, their example, their counsel and their high standard generally, help to draw out the statue from the block. Never shall I know till I get beyond the veil how much I owe to these skilled workmen. If it be true that I have left

father, mother, sisters, brothers for Christ's sake, it is also true that I have found them again "a hundredfold" in my brethren in Religion.

Sometimes their charity takes the form of Fraternal *Correction*. But then it is God Himself Who presides. He arms His workmen with the necessary tools and bids them chip away at the block, showing them just where to aim and what particular angles and roughnesses are to be chipped off. More often the blows are indirect, and the workmen themselves are quite unconscious of what they are doing; and it is just the friction, caused by their own shortcomings, which is fashioning my block and causing me to learn lessons of patience, self-abnegation and meekness, which help on the likeness so enormously. And meanwhile I am doing the same for them. (I am a little apt to forget that I am just as trying to others as they are to me.) And so the blessed work of Fraternal Charity is ever going forward, and the spouses of Christ are helping each other to gain more and more resemblance to their crucified Lord. "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. cxxxii. 1). And how this blessed unity should lift us up above all pettiness and envy and jealousy and want of charity in any form! Differences of nationality, of temperament, taste, talent, education, there may be—if it were not so there would be very little scope for the sculpturing; but underlying all these is the great supernatural

bond of unity—unity of heart, of desire, of hope. Oh, if I could only look at things supernaturally—that is, as they really are—how much more quickly would the likeness to my Divine Spouse be developed in me!

Have my brethren guessed how grateful I am to them for all they are doing for me? Does my bright, cheerful manner make their work—often difficult—a pleasure? Do they feel that the more faithful they are the greater will be my charity towards them—the closer will be the bond of union between us? A little self-examination on this point would probably be useful—perhaps even surprising. Let me see to it, too, that Fraternal Charity is not a mere name with me, but that it forms an indispensable part of my life, and is really a striking feature in my character. Let me be known as the one in Community who always finds an excuse for the faults of others, who is always ready to put a favourable construction, who somehow contrives to slip in a good word for one who is being discussed unfavourably, who has charity ever ready not only in her heart, but on her lips. "Charity is patient, is kind, thinketh no evil, believeth all things, hopeth all things. Follow after charity" (1 Cor. xiii.–xiv.), for it does not come naturally. It is a supernatural plant and has to be cultivated.

Point III.—The Block and Co-operation

What part does the block play in the fashioning process? Its part is a *passive* one—to sit still and

allow the Divine Sculptor to have things all His own way, to let Him do as He will with me, use what tools He will, put them into the hands of whom He will, chip where He will and when He will, leave me on one side and give all His attention to others if He will. Is the block, then, to be soft and crumbling—apathetic, almost careless? Oh, no; it is to have a strong determination, which nothing can shake, not to allow anything to hinder the Master's work in it, its whole being set on having that likeness developed by which GOD is to be glorified through all eternity. It is only by force of will that it *can* be passive and prevent its own strong inclinations from making it so hard to chip that the delicate outlines are in danger. This is co-operation, and if this is my attitude the work *must* be progressing, though I may not be able to certify the progress. If I am co-operating with the Master and looking at things from His point of view, such questions as which particular workman dealt a particular blow, and what the particular motive was, will not concern me at all. *All* the blows are GOD'S immediate dealings with me—each one separately chosen to give the particular touch that He needs for His work at that particular moment. He makes no mistakes either in the workmen He selects, or the kind of blow, or the time or the place. I may safely leave all in His Hands, for He desires, with an intensity that I cannot understand because I cannot understand

His *love,* to see the likeness to His Son developing in me. What madness to want to interfere with plans and designs that have been made from all eternity! What a want of intelligence and confidence to ask for some little trivial change to be made because, forsooth, there is something that does not suit me in my Superior or in the house to which I am sent or in those with whom I have to work! How my Guardian Angel must blush for shame at my childishness! And the sad part of it is that GOD will sometimes give in to my pettish insistence, and I shall never know till I see my crucified Spouse face to face how much the likeness suffered in consequence.

"*A statue representing the Man of Sorrows, reproducing in every feature Christ crucified.*" This is GOD'S design for me. This is what He sees when He sees me in Christ as I shall be—if I co-operate. It was because He was working to this design that He made me the spouse of His Own Beloved Son. This was why He took me out of the world and made me live in His Own House—even in the King's Palace. This explains why He has seemed to take such infinite trouble with me all my life long, and has led me by what have sometimes seemed such circuitous and unnecessary paths. All had their part in the design and were intended to produce some feature of Christ crucified. Never for one moment has GOD lost sight of His design for me—*a statue representing the Man of Sorrows.*

And shall I lose sight of it? Shall I not rather co-operate in the design with all my heart and soul? Shall I not lie passive in His Hands while He is producing in me, by any means He chooses, the likeness to my crucified Spouse? Cannot I bear the fashioning process for a little while, and with the eye of faith see the finished statue as He sees it? Dare I, by my restiveness and gloominess and pettishness, risk being a less perfect statue—a less faithful likeness than He has designed? Oh, surely not, but however hard the sculpturing may be to bear—and the harder the block the harder it *will* be—I will look up into the Master's Face and see His look of infinite yearning and love and tenderness, and I will say to myself: It is worth while; one day "*I shall be like Him, for I shall see Him as He is*" (1 John iii. 2).

Colloquy. O my dear brethren in Heaven, members of my own Community, who have followed the same Rule as mine, who have passed through the same training process, who know all about the workshop, the workmen and the blocks, look down upon those who are *following after* and help them to attain one day that perfection which they so earnestly desire.

Resolution. As to charity. As to co-operation.

Spiritual Bouquet. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

PERPETUAL VOWS

"*The soul of the Religious cannot be the true spouse of our glorified Lord, unless she has been in this life the spouse of our crucified Lord*" (St. Francis of Sales).

1*st Prelude.* My Crucifix and my Ring.

2*nd Prelude.* Grace to be "nailed to the Cross with Christ," my Spouse.

Point I.—My Perpetual Vows

Some years have passed now since I first entered the House of God to see whether I should be allowed to be one of its inmates. Then came the glad day when I was affianced to my Divine Lord; and after two or three years—years which to the true Religious "seem but a few days because of the greatness of His love" (Gen. xxix. 20)—I heard the long-awaited cry: "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh," and knowing that He had come to claim His bride, I went to meet Him and to offer for His acceptance my three Vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. And though we—my Divine Spouse and I—regarded those Vows as binding for ever, yet they *were* in reality only *temporary*, and until I had taken my *Perpetual* Vows my Superiors would have had a perfect right to dismiss me, had they thought fit.

And this is why my Divine Spouse during all those years never seemed to cease saying: "*If thou wilt be perfect, come.*" He knew that all—even the permission to make my Vows perpetual—depended on how I corresponded to that appeal. *He* chose me in the beginning, but all along He has allowed my acceptance of His choice to be quite voluntary. And so it was only after long years of waiting and training and learning by experience what it all meant that He said to me: I am sure of you now, you may come *if you will* and take your *Perpetual Vows*, and never again will I ask you to renew them publicly. "*Do you desire to take Jesus Christ crucified as your Lord and as your Spouse?*" And I answered, "*That is my desire.*" I desire to be for ever His. I desire to be allowed to say publicly that my vows are beyond recall; by them I nailed myself to His Cross long ago, and now all I want to do is to secure the nails so that they can *never* come out.

Point II.—The Bridegroom's Presents

At my *Profession* He gave me wonderful presents, exceeding in value anything that I could ever have dreamt of. Has He got further treasures in reserve for me? Yes, two very special ones that He kept for to-day—the day of my Perpetual Vows.

(1) *The Crucifix.* It might have startled me had He given me this at first, but He knows that it will not now. Under His loving training I have

learnt that the Crucifix is the sweetest treasure I can have. As it is put into my hands, a feeling of possession seizes me—it is *mine*, and He who is stretched there upon it is *mine*. He has given me this as a proof—it is all true. What a real share I have in it! As truly as my Divine Spouse is lying on that cross so truly am I. He has made room for me there hidden behind Himself, and there I shall be as long as life lasts. I am the spouse of Him Who was crucified. The Church is putting its sanction upon the alliance—everybody is bearing witness to it. What a proud and happy moment! But something is being said to me: "*Receive this cross, whereon He Who from henceforth is to be thy model and the only object of thy love is nailed.*" How lovingly do I receive it! "JESUS, my Love, is crucified," and I am His spouse. He is to be my *model*—I am to copy Him in His crucifixion now more than ever—and *always*. Never again must there be any drawing back, any shrinking from the cross. It is *mine*—my present from my Divine Spouse, to remind me always of Himself and of our union. The stories of my Vocation, of my Profession, of my Religious life as a victim—all seem to be written there. There I see the *Sacred Face* so wistful, so loving, so pleading, just as I saw it at first when He looked at me and said: "If thou wilt be perfect, come." There is the *Crown of Thorns* telling me that the crown of glory hereafter is only for those who have worn the

crown of thorns here, and that my brain and my intellect must bear the stamp of Him Whom I have taken to be my Lord and Spouse; that my thoughts are all to be captives, encircled by the crown of thorns, beyond which they cannot go. I look again at the *nails*—old friends they are now, speaking to me always of the nails of my Profession, my three Vows. But the light that is thrown upon them is slightly different—everybody else regards them as perpetual *now*, and that seems to give a sense of security, like the little nut at the back which prevents the nail from coming out.

"*Who from henceforth is to be thy model.*" My Crucifix speaks very plainly and tells me how my crucified Spouse is to be my model. Just as He gave His *Body* into the hands of His executioners, so I must give mine into the hands of my Superiors. It is no longer mine; they, not I, have to decide what is to be done with it, and how it is to be treated. His *Hands* are stretched out in obedience to the will of others, so are mine to be—ready for any work that is given them to do, be it artistic or commonplace, delicate or coarse. His *Eyes*, patient, downcast, aching and full of blood, speak to me of my Rules of Modesty, and remind me that I must be meek, humble, modest as He was, that I must guard against all curiosity, which would so soon mar the interior silence of my Religious life. What an important part my eyes have to play in the con-

tract which makes me the spouse of Christ! *His* were crucified; are mine to be allowed to wander where they will without any restrictions to their liberty? Surely not. And when through failing sight or disease my eyes become a constant source of trial and mortification, will not the thought that every member of my body is nailed to the cross with Christ give me courage and patience? His *Tongue* "cleaving to the roof of His mouth" reminds me of my Rule of Silence—that Rule which is so often a crucifixion in itself. What better check could there be on my desire to talk than the thought of the sacred tongue of my Beloved, swollen, parched, tortured for me? His *Feet*, so often weary, worn out, bleeding, are now firmly nailed—no longer able to go where they will. Can I ever again complain of fatigue or expect a zeal for souls to be possible without demands being made on the powers of the body? As I look at *His* Body, thin, emaciated, covered with wounds and bruises, every line in it speaks to me of mortification and makes me blush for shame to think how often I have pampered mine and given in to its demands. "I am nailed to the Cross with Christ"—this is the answer to every question that poor shrinking nature would ask, to every plaint that it wails forth. Crucifixion—this is what I pledge myself to, and my Divine Spouse expects me to understand or He would never have chosen the Crucifix as His present to me to-day. "Receive

this for thy model." But He goes farther and adds—

"And as *the only object of thy love.*" It is not only the *body* which is to be prepared for crucifixion, but the *soul*, too, with all its powers, and the *heart* with all its affections. My crucified Lord is to be the only object of my love—that means that my affections for all beside must bear the stamp of the cross in some form or another. Friends, sisters and brothers, even father and mother, must take a secondary place; my Divine Spouse must be my first consideration—everything else must be put on one side for Him and regarded only from His point of view. What a crucifixion of heart! and of *will* too, for if He is the *only* object of my love, I shall love Him, not myself—I shall love His will, not my own. His slightest wish, expressed by any one whom He chooses to place over me, will be my wish. Ah, there is much, very much, contained in this present of my Divine Spouse. Am I sorry and almost wishing that He had chosen another? getting a little weary of the thought that I am nailed to the cross with Christ? or is conformity to His will becoming such a *habit* with me now that it scarcely seems like a *crossing* of my will—crucified *with* Christ? Happy the Religious whose experience this is: "My Beloved to me, and I to Him"—this is *all* and it is *enough.* This is the state of greater perfection into which I put myself by taking my Perpetual Vows, and to all suggestions

of my now being dead and buried as far as the world is concerned I answer: It is true, quite true, I am crucified with Christ and I am buried with Him, but *nevertheless I live* (Gal. ii. 19). Life is going on as well as death, and the life is so intense, so real, so different to the life before my crucifixion that sometimes I can only explain it to myself by using St. Paul's words: "It is *not I, but Christ Who liveth in me.*"

(2) The second present is the *Ring*: "*Herewith I betroth thee as the spouse of Jesus Christ, Son of the Most High God, wherefore receive this ring of fidelity, the seal of the Holy Spirit, so that henceforward thou mayest be rightly called the spouse of God.*" And the spouse makes answer in a glad hymn of praise: "*I am the bride of Him Whom the Angels serve, Whose beauty the sun and moon gaze upon with admiring wonder. The Lord Jesus Christ has put His ring upon my finger—He has crowned me in the character of His Spouse*" (Roman Pontifical).

It is not difficult to meditate on these words—they cannot but be ever ringing in the ears and heart of those who have received this precious gift. Receive this ring—the ring of fidelity, the ring which is a proof that my Divine Spouse trusts me—a proof to angels and to men that I am really betrothed to the Son of the Most High God—a proof that the Holy Spirit has set His seal—given His sanction to our alliance. Jesus Christ Himself has put His ring upon my finger so that I may

rightly be called the spouse of GOD. Can I ever look at my ring without again joining in that glad hymn of praise and thanksgiving to GOD for my Vocation?

The Ring is not only a *proof*, but also a picture of our union. However carefully I examine it I shall never find out where it is joined. *Is* this a picture of my union with my Lord? Is it so perfect that no one can detect any break, no one can ever tell where His will begins and mine ends? My ring must be a constant reminder to me of what my Heavenly Spouse expects—*fidelity*—a perfect, unceasing, untiring round of devotion to His Will. Only the gold of *love* is capable of this perfect fusion: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." "Lovest thou Me?"

Colloquy with my Divine Lover, Who is once again handing me the Crucifix and putting the ring on my finger.

Resolution. Never to disappoint that "everlasting love."

Spiritual Bouquet. "I am nailed to the cross with Christ, nevertheless I live."

DIVINE OFFICE

"*By Him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise always to* God, *that is to say, the fruit of lips confessing to His Name*" (Heb. xiii. 15).

1*st Prelude.* The place my Divine Spouse has prepared for me among the Angels, from where He intends me to chant the Divine Office for ever.

2*nd Prelude.* Grace to understand the value of my many rehearsals.

Point I.—Divine Office. What it is

The Angels have sung God's praise without any cessation ever since they were "created to praise, reverence and serve God." Once, when their little Master was first shown to this earth of ours, they had to come down so low that earth caught some of the strains of the Heavenly music, and so enchanted were those who heard them that they formed a choir on earth to join its praises with those of the nine choirs of Heaven. And ever since, the voice of praise has been unceasing on earth too—this voice of praise is the Divine Office—divine in its origin, divine in its object. Every Religious Community has its share in this daily offering of praise to God by the Church. It may not be of obligation for every Order to recite it,

but it is so much in keeping with the essential spirit of every Order that where it is not included in the Rule something else is invariably substituted for it. Speaking generally, the Contemplative Orders recite the Greater Office or the Canonical Hours—it is their special work, their *officium*, and the only occupation binding on them; and the Active Orders, the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, also *Liturgical* because it contains all the parts of the Canonical Office and has the same Rubrics. The Rosary sometimes replaces both the Greater and the Little Office.

The Divine Office, distributed, as the Church evidently intends it to be by its name of "Hours," throughout the day, affords us constant opportunities of putting ourselves into touch with God and holding little conversations with Him. The Psalms of David, which form the greater part of it, are well calculated to attune themselves to the variety of chords that are vibrating in every heart. He knew every phase of life—from the shepherd-boy's to the king's, from being "a man according to God's own heart" to being the villain in the piece; and he sang—though in different strains—about them all. So Divine Office is ever ready "to rejoice with those that rejoice and to weep with those that weep"—it is a faithful friend understanding every mood and having its "word in season."

The Divine Office is the great common prayer of

the Church and ranks high above all other prayers, being second only to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. *One* of its prayers, says St. Alphonsus de Liguori, is of more value than a hundred private prayers. And let me never forget, too, that the Office is a sacred *charge*—it is a part of the Church's praise which she entrusts not only to her Priests, but also to the spouses of Christ; they are the representatives or delegates of the Church, saying its prayers and singing its praises to God. What an honour to be one of the Church's delegates before the Throne of God!

Oh, how much I ought to value the privilege of being allowed to join in the Divine Office! How I should love the sacred words that have rolled off the lips and filled the hearts and minds of countless numbers of Priests and Religious in every age of the Church's history—yea, which were used by the sons and daughters of Sion in His Temple long before its gates were opened for the King of Glory to pass in! What a bond of union is the Divine Office between the Old Dispensation and the New, between earth and Heaven, between men and angels, between their Divine Spouse and those whom He chooses and consecrates to sing His Father's praise.

Point II.—Divine Office: Its Object

(1) Its first and foremost object is the glory of God, and for this reason our whole strength should be put into it. During its recital the *whole* man

should be engaged—mind and body, heart and soul. The *mind* to recall the Intention, or to dwell on the words of the Office or to follow the Angels' chanting; the *body* by its attitude, reverent, dignified, modest, recollected, aiding the great work in hand and proud to be allowed to take part in a ceremony at which Angels also are assisting, offering ever its "sacrifice of the lips," and remembering for its consolation that even Isaias could not join the Angels' Office till one of them flew down to him and touched his lips with a live coal taken from the Altar in Heaven; the *heart*, seeing to it that all is done out of love to the Divine Spouse Who perfects the praise that comes from the mouths of His little ones when it is offered in union with His own; and lastly the *soul*, ever supplying that good-will which the Angels were singing about when mortal ears first caught heavenly melodies, and stamping all with the motto *Ad majorem Dei gloriam.*

(2) The second object of the Divine Office is prayer. It is the Religious's principal form of prayer, and is the time for invoking GOD'S blessing on the Church, on our Community, on all our work undertaken for His glory, on the living and the dead, on ourselves, our families and all our intentions. There is no need to tax the brain and spoil the spirit of recollection by trying to remember them all. Let me just be recollected and remember that I am the Church's representative praying for

all her intentions, and I shall be sure to say my Office well. And let me remember, too, that my Divine Spouse counts on the prayers of His chosen ones for all those who never pray for themselves. It is "through Him, with Him, and in Him" that they say their Office; that is, that they offer the sacrifice of praise, for they are one with Him Whose praise to His Father is unceasing; and when the praise takes the form of pleading for sinners, it is the Divine Spouse Who pleads—He "Whom the Father heareth always."

(3) The third object of the Office is to sanctify every part of the day. It is a kind of signpost on the road to perfection, reminding me why I am on it and exhorting me to renew my fervour and my intentions, before I pass on. At each signpost I stop to join not only my Community in praising God, but all other Communities, present, past and future—to join in the great hymn of praise which is ever going up from earth to Heaven—yea, to join the nine choirs of Angels themselves, and to put myself into the place prepared for me amongst them from which I hope to continue my part in the Divine Office for ever.

I have seen how I *may* say my Office; how *do* I say it? Let me answer this question which my Divine Spouse puts to me before I leave my Meditation. *Does* it sanctify my day? *Is* it my greatest comfort and delight, the moment when I feel myself in union with the *whole* Church, the moment

when I can pay off all my debts of thanksgiving, of prayers promised, of intercessions for loved ones, of pleadings for conversions, of prayers for the Holy Souls? Oh, how much I could do by saying my Office! How much *do* I do? How much do I intend to do in the future?

Colloquy with my Divine Spouse.

Resolution. To have at least *one* intention each time that I say Office.

Spiritual Bouquet. "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy House, O Lord, they shall praise Thee for ever" (Ps. lxxxiii. 5).

THE RELIGIOUS AND THE MASS

"*Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto* God" (Rom. xii. 1).

1*st Prelude.* The Altar all ready for Mass.
2*nd Prelude.* Grace to be ready, too—ready to be the victim.

Point I.—The Victim

First, let us remind ourselves what a *Religious* is: one who has *bound* herself to God in a special manner. Baptism binds every one, but a Religious, by her three Vows, nails herself down to the cross. To what cross? To that of her Divine Spouse. It is on Calvary, then, that the Profession of a Religious takes place. There she goes to make herself one with her crucified Lord. And when the sacrifice of Calvary is renewed on the Altar, then will the true Religious renew also her sacrifice and lay herself again on the Altar with the Divine Victim. It is, then, in the spirit of a *victim* that a Religious should hear Mass.

Let me shake off sloth and all self-indulgent ideas of repose and ease during Mass. My Divine Spouse is going to the Sacrifice—the sacrifice of Himself. I am *bound* to go too, to offer myself with Him—"a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto

God." It was as a Victim that Jesus was pleasing unto God, and it is only as a victim that I, His spouse, can be the same. I must go to Mass not only to have the merits of His Sacrifice applied to me again, but to make *my* sacrifice over again, to stretch myself again upon the Altar, to renew my Vows, to creep up close to the Great High Priest with Whom I am so closely identified and to say again: "In what place soever Thou shalt be my Lord King, either in death or in life, there will Thy servant be" (2 Kings xv. 21). What Thou art going to do, I, in my measure, am going to do too. Thou art about to offer Thyself as a Victim for me, I am going to offer myself as a victim to Thee. Thou art offering Thyself for the salvation of souls, I also will offer myself for the great work of the Apostolate to which every Religious is pledged, be her Order what it may.

Point II.—The Sacrifice

And now I am waiting for the Sacrifice to begin. I have only to raise my eyes to the Altar to see how everything speaks of sacrifice and reminds me that it is as a victim that I must assist at Mass. There is the *Altar* hiding relics of the *martyrs;* the *candles* consuming themselves as they burn to God's honour and glory (a thought big enough for a whole Meditation!); the three *coverings* of the Altar speaking of grave-clothes and burial; and,

surmounting all, the *Crucifix*, which says silently: This is Calvary.

Now the Priest-Victim is coming to begin the Sacrifice of Himself, and I unite myself with Him. As I look at Him I know well how each of His Vestments, if I will let it, speaks to me of His suffering and His sacrifice on Calvary, *and* of mine.

What are the first words that I hear? *Introibo ad altare Domini*—I will go—and go to the Altar, go to sacrifice—and to sacrifice *Myself*. And His spouse echoes His words, as she makes the sign of the cross—that cross to which she, too, is nailed. *Introibo*—I will go too—go to sacrifice *myself* "through Him, with Him, and in Him."

Now, my Divine Spouse—for I must not forget that it is He—is going up the steps to the Altar, and as He goes He says: "*Aufer a nobis iniquitates nostras*"—take away from *us our* iniquities—that *we* may be worthy—He includes me in His prayers, identifies Himself with me, and takes me, as it were, with Him right into the Holy of Holies, there to present my offering.

Now the Priest is *kissing the stone* which covers the relics of the martyrs—and I remember with something of their ecstasy and joy that I, too, am spiritually a martyr and that I am offering myself to God no less really than they did.

Presently I hear the *Gloria in excelsis*, which reminds me that the first end of sacrifice is *Adora-*

tion, and I offer my body, my soul, my whole self, to Him as a proof that I adore Him.

Now comes the *Offertory*, when all the things that are needed for the sacrifice are made ready by the Priest, and offered to GOD for His acceptance and use. And this is the moment in which the Religious will make ready *her* sacrifice. How eagerly will she lay herself down as a victim on the Altar for GOD'S acceptance and use, to be consecrated afresh to Him, saying with the Priest as she does so, "In the spirit of humility, and with a contrite heart, let *us* be received by Thee, O Lord; and grant that the sacrifice we offer in Thy sight this day may be pleasing to Thee, O Lord GOD. Come, O Sanctifier, Almighty, Eternal GOD, and bless this sacrifice prepared to Thy Holy Name." And as we thus renew our Vows, we shall not forget the four ends for which the Divine Sacrifice is going to be offered. It is our highest Act of *Worship*, our most costly present of *Thanksgiving*, the only *Expiation* for our sins, and our sole plea for *asking* that all our needs and those of all the living and the dead may be supplied.

Suscipe, Sancta Trinitas. Receive, O Holy Trinity, this oblation which is offered also in honour of "the Blessed Mary ever Virgin, of Blessed John Baptist, the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and of all the Saints . . . that they in Heaven may intercede for us." My Mother Mary and my dear Patron Saint, then, are helping me to make my sacrifice.

The Priest is turning round. What has he to say? He is making one last appeal to his assistants before the sacrifice begins: *Orate, fratres*—"Pray, brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Father Almighty." Oh, how earnestly do I pray that that victim which I have laid upon the Altar, and which seems almost outside myself now, may be accepted, too, with the Divine Offering.

Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus. All is holy now—there is a solemn hush. The Great High Priest is going into the Holy of Holies—we can hear the sound of His bells. He is offering Himself to His Father. I raise my eyes for a moment and I see Him lifted up between Heaven and earth, recalling instinctively His own words: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all things to Myself" (St. John xii. 32), and I remember that I am crucified with Him—that He has offered me to the Father with Himself, that I am a victim too. "O Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world," how can I ever thank Thee enough for choosing *me* to be one of those who may "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth"! "Grant me peace"; and I know that He has granted it, for while the Priest has been silently praying, the "Holy Angel" has been busy carrying all "these things" that he found on the Altar up to the "Altar on high," and he must have carried my heart too, for I laid it there for God to do what He liked with it. This

is peace—*His* peace—the heart detached from earth—*Pax Domini sit semper vobiscum.*

The Act of Sacrifice is finished, the mystical separation of the Body and Blood has taken place, the Victim is offered, but there is still an integral part of the Sacrifice wanting, and all the assistants are waiting for it. It is the consuming of the Victim—the *Priest's Communion.* He must partake of the Victim, and thus unite himself intimately with the Body and Blood of Christ.

And now when all is finished the faithful may come and feed upon the Victim too, for the Priest, in imitation of his Divine Master, is distributing the Body of Christ to all who will come and partake of It. Holy Communion is the direct result of the Sacrifice—the Gift which the Priest-Victim is able to give because He offered Himself: "This is My Body which is given for you—take, eat."

Domine, non sum dignus. "Lord, I am not worthy." I know it, my child, but remember "you have not chosen Me, I have chosen you" —chosen you to be My fellow-victim, and I want you to come and unite yourself in the most perfect way possible with Me and with My Sacrifice. I want My spouse to be a partaker in all that concerns Me—yea, even of My Divine Nature. Come, then, and feed on the Victim, come and receive My spirit of self-sacrifice, for so only will you have strength and courage to continue your own and to live your life as a victim. "Separated from Me

you can do nothing." "He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood abideth in Me and I in him."

Oh, blessed union! "My Beloved to me and I to Him." "*Quid retribuam.*" What shall I render? My gratitude is too deep for words—but it seems to me that never again can I find *my* sacrifice too great.

Ite Missa est. Go, it is the dismissal. The great Sacrifice is finished, but before the Priest dismisses us with the blessing of the Living Victim, he turns once more to the Altar and says, *Placeat Tibi sancta Trinitas.* "Grant that the Sacrifice which I, though unworthy, have offered . . . may be acceptable to Thee, and through Thy mercy may be a propitiation for me and all those for whom I have offered it." Our last thoughts, then, are directed towards the Sacrifice.

As I turn away from Calvary two thoughts seem to take possession of my soul: (1) That *I am God's victim.* I shall not be surprised or disturbed, then, if everything seems to "go wrong" directly Mass is over, if all things seem to combine to ruffle me, if my will is thwarted, if I have to suffer physically or mentally. GOD is merely taking me at my word. All such things are the natural consequences of being GOD'S victim. I do not expect surely to lie undisturbed on the Altar! GOD must consume His Victim, and that cannot be done without pain and suffering—the knife

must cut and the fire must burn, but the knife is used by no human hand, and the fire is the fire of Divine Love. (2) The second thought that I am possessed with is that *my heart is in Heaven*, so close is my union with my Divine Spouse. And though my sacrifice, like His, has to be perpetual, lasting as long as life lasts, I cannot but be always contented, always joyous, always at peace, for earth's storms cannot reach GOD'S victim—its Heaven has already begun.

Colloquy with the Divine Victim.

Resolution. Always to hear Mass in the spirit of a victim.

Spiritual Bouquet. "Lo, I come to do Thy Will, O my GOD."

THE FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

"*Tota pulchra es, Maria, et macula originalis non est in te*" (The Gradual).

1*st Prelude.* A door is opened in Heaven and I am allowed to look in for a minute—the blaze of light, the splendour, the immensity, the music—a glimpse of the Throne, of the Lamb, of Mary, of the crowd of Angels and Saints, of my empty place.

2*nd Prelude.* The grace to realize things as they are.

Point I.—The Divine Conference

Let me listen with the ear of faith to that Conference of the Blessed Trinity which took place far back in the eternal ages. Let *us* make a woman in our Image and to our likeness. She shall bruise the serpent's heel—that is, she shall be always victorious over sin, and this cannot be if the stain of sin touches her.

God the Father : She is to give His human nature to my Son—the Son must be like the Mother, the Mother, then, *must* be free from sin.

God the Son : She has to co-operate with Me in the work of Redemption. What Eve will lose Mary must recover—not by her merits, but by furnishing Me with flesh and blood which I can

use for man's redemption—that flesh and blood *must* be sinless.

God the Holy Ghost: She is to be My Spouse, and to My Spouse I must be able to say: "Thou art *all* fair, My love, there is *no spot* in thee." Mary *must* be sinless.

And so the great Fiat was spoken, and the Immaculate Conception became a dogma in Heaven.

Point II.—The Feast in Heaven To-day

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception is specially dear to the hearts of the spouses of Christ; they make everything as beautiful as they can, and sometimes they say, "It is like Heaven." And perhaps a Conventual Mass on a day like this, when some of His chosen ones are putting on His livery for the first time, and others are taking their Vows of fidelity, and all are renewing them, is as near to Heaven as anything can be on earth. Yet it must come far short, for "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard: neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor. ii. 9). *Love*, however, may pierce the veil which is too dense for either the senses or the intellect. Let us with our hearts full of love for our sweet Mother try to see how they are keeping her Feast in Heaven to-day. It may be that we shall see things which are very real and precious to us, though we may never be able to utter them.

God the Father is honouring His daughter

whom He has crowned as Queen of Heaven. God the Son, Who treats her ever as His Mother, is saying in answer to her ceaseless petitions for her children: "Ask, My Mother, for I must not turn away thy face" (3 Kings ii. 20). God the Holy Ghost is overshadowing His Spouse, and whispering, "Thou art all fair—no spot." All the whole company of Heaven—angels, saints, martyrs, confessors, matrons, virgins, those who have been there since the Kingdom of Heaven was "opened to all believers," and those who have only just arrived from Purgatory—all are joining in one great swelling chorus: "*Tota pulchra es, Maria, et macula originalis non est in te.*" And Mary, the great Queen of Heaven whom all are delighting to honour to-day, what part is she taking, what does she say? In spite of the music of countless harps, and the songs of praise coming from countless multitudes, we can catch her whisper: "*Ecce ancilla Domini*" (Behold the handmaid of the Lord). It is the name she gave herself and the one she loves the best. And if our love is strong enough to keep us there a little longer we see a wondrous sight—one and all, Mary too, are casting their crowns down before the Throne—before the Lamb, saying, "Thou art worthy, for Thou hast redeemed us by Thy Blood" (Apoc. v. 9). Yes, Mary too, for it was His Blood that saved her from the stain of original sin, and made her Immaculate Conception possible.

Point III.—The Canticle of the Lamb

What is this Canticle that I do not seem able to forget? It is none other than the "new canticle" —my own song which I hope to take part in one day when I join the blessed company of those who "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." And my Divine Spouse does not want me to forget it. *He* put it into my heart when He chose me—it cannot be learned by all (Apoc. xiv. 3). Earth is the place for learning it, Purgatory for perfecting it; and when false notes and false time are things unheard of, when there is nothing in me that will spoil the harmony, then I shall be allowed to take my place in Heaven and to sing my part in the new canticle of Thanksgiving before the Throne where Mary is singing it to-day.

"Benediction and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving, honour and power and strength, to our God for ever and ever" (Apoc. vii. 12). Is it a difficult canticle to learn? Is it difficult to be always singing—praising and thanking God for everything? Surely not for the spouse of Christ. *She* does not cry with the exiled children of Israel: "How shall we sing the song of the Lord in a strange land?" (Ps. cxxxvi. 3). She is in no strange land, but in the house of her Royal Spouse, in the very vestibule of Heaven. It would be difficult for her to keep from singing, she has so much to sing about. Joy and praise must ever be not only

in her heart, but on her lips and on her countenance, proclaiming to all who see her that her vocation is such a delight—such a precious gift that eternity will be too short to praise God sufficiently for it, she *must* begin now.

Colloquy. O my Immaculate Mother, from thy place in Heaven so close to my Divine Spouse where thou art singing thy *Magnificat*, look down upon thy child to-day. Though a very distant one there *is* a likeness between her and thee. She at Baptism was freed from the stain of original sin, and next to thine, she has the highest vocation a woman can have. O grant her an increasing likeness to thee in thy spotless purity and in thy joy. *Causa nostrae laetitiae, ora pro nobis.*

Resolution. To look beyond the mists of earth, which generally consist of self in one form or another, to my bright home above where Mary is, and where the Lamb's glad song of joy is being perfectly chanted.

Spiritual Bouquet. "*Cantate Domino canticum novum*" (Sing to the Lord a new song).

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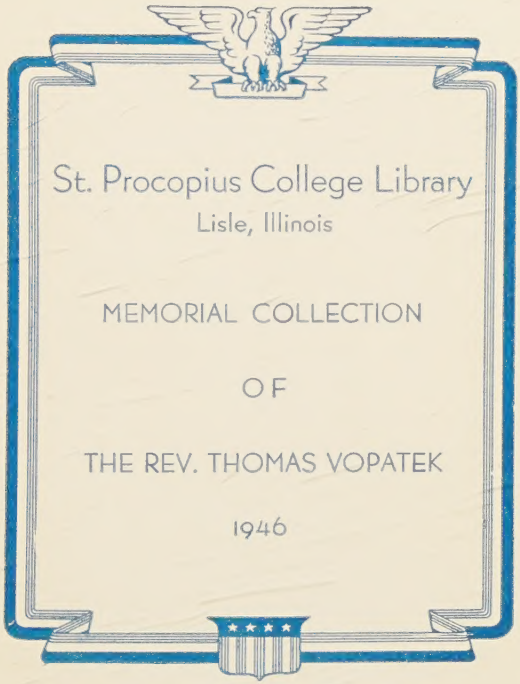
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